

## Plastic bags cause indigestion

■ A survey among farmers in Burkina Faso has revealed that 18% of small ruminants and 10% of cattle reared in the town die as a result of eating plastic bags. Figures for animals sent for slaughter are even higher. A researcher at the livestock research institute, the Centre international de recherche-développement sur l'élevage en zone sub-humide (CIRDES), found plastic bags in the stomachs of 28% of small ruminants and 29% of cattle. In Rwanda and South Africa, legislation requires that plastic bags have a maximum thickness of 100 and 30 µm, respectively, in order to protect both the environment and livestock. In Kigali, black plastic bags have disappeared from shops and streets. In Kenya, thin plastic bags should soon be banned and the thicker ones heavily taxed. Financial incentives will favour the use of environmentally-friendly bags such as those made out of cotton.

## A beehive from Vietnam

■ Senegal's national beekeepers' organisation, the Union nationale des apiculteurs du Sénégal (UNAS), is seeking to modernise honey production with the help of a Vietnamese-style hive. According to UNAS President Babacar Cissé, the Asian hive, made of clay and concrete and vertical in shape, is better suited to the climate of Senegal than the Kenyan hive, which is made of wood and has a horizontal form. The Vietnamese hive should also cost less. UNAS's aim is to help beekeepers become more autonomous by selecting hives that are suited to local conditions, but which also conform to modern requirements. The ultimate goal is to see beekeeping develop as an activity in its own right, rather than allow it to remain as a highly marginalised sub-sector of livestock rearing.

## Organising inputs

■ "Providing effective support to agricultural development in Africa by supplying quality inputs." That is the declared aim of the Fédération africaine des associations du commerce des intrants agricoles (FACIA), a federation of fertiliser suppliers which was launched in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) on October 7, 2004. Some 27 national and sub-regional organisations, representing around 5,000 professionals supplying fertiliser, phyto-sanitary products, seeds and agricultural equipment from 14 countries in West and Central Africa took part in the general assembly to launch the new body, which is based in Mali. The first task that the association has set itself is to build up contacts with partners in the market and to defend the sector's interests during the harmonisation of regulations at regional level.

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## A local flour



Photos: © S. Antoine

■ Developed in Burkina Faso in 1992 by a French NGO, Misola flour is an infant food made from locally cultivated cereals and legumes (millet, soya and peanut). Its ingredients are in keeping with local dietary practices and its protein-energy levels are high enough to make it a balanced food to be used in conjunction with breastmilk or with other traditional foods. Easily

assimilated and digested, Misola complies with the norms recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).

In view of these benefits, the World Food Programme (WFP) has decided to use it in preference to imported flours, which are three times as expensive. In Mali, WFP has just signed a 5-year agreement with the organisation making Misola to supply an annual 400 t of the flour. If the initiative proves successful, WFP may develop the sector and extend it to involve more African farmers.

Both Cameroon and Burkina Faso, which produce respectively 3 and 24 t each year, are still far from able to satisfy demand for the flour.

The infant flour produces income for farmers who grow cereals and legumes and also benefits women's groups which have set up small-scale production units to manufacture and package the food in sachets of 200 or 500 g.



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## Better technology for African farmers

■ Resource-poor African farmers are being given the chance to grow high-yielding crops, thanks to an initiative by the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), which links small-scale producers up with technological solutions for agriculture.

The foundation is a public-private partnership that aims to boost incomes and food security for the rural poor in sub-Saharan Africa by overcoming the high costs and restrictions imposed by intellectual property rights, which act as barriers to African farmers' adoption of new technologies. Based in Nairobi, the foundation has already raised US\$14 million for its work in the first 5 years of operation. AATF's role is to negotiate between farmers and technology providers to offer solutions to improve productivity and reduce costs. Once access to technologies has been agreed upon, the foundation finds ways of adapting them to African conditions and mass production.

One project identified by the AATF will give small-scale farmers access to maize varieties with B-carotene and other pro-vitamin A elements. The AATF sources the germplasm, negotiates intellectual property rights and facilitates field-testing in Africa, as well as the adoption and dissemination of the maize. A cowpea productivity improvement project will enable farmers to access high quality cowpea seed, with increased productivity and resistance to infestation by insect pests.

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## A safer pump

■ In Diola, the most widely spoken language in the Casamance region of Senegal, 'Erobon' means spring. That is also the name chosen for a pump being made here and designed to provide drinking water for rural households, villages and neighbourhoods in the towns. The 'Erobon' can pump water up from a depth of 40 m, either from a well or a small bore hole.

Its main advantage is that it works in a hermetically sealed well, so that water cannot be polluted by waste or animal carcasses and there is less risk for children. Easy-to-use, this pump lightens the workload of women, who no longer have to draw water up from the bottom of the well. It also saves on ropes and buckets.

Besides its technical advantages, the pump has the advantage of being manufactured



Photo: M. Seck © Sylla international

locally, as are its spare parts. It sells at between FCFA100,000 and 120,000 (€150 and 180), which includes installation and a cover for the well.

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