

THE PROTEINS OF SORGHUM AND MILLETS: ENHANCING NUTRITIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL PROPERTIES FOR AFRICA

Sorghum, pearl millet and finger millet are indigenous African cereals that, unlike maize and wheat, are well adapted to African semi-arid and sub-tropical agronomic conditions. Some 49 % and 55% of world's millet and sorghum cultivation areas, respectively, are in Africa. These grains represent the major source of dietary energy and protein for some 1 billion people in the semi-arid tropics. Not only are sorghum and millet proteins nutritionally important, they appear to have unique functional characteristics and are potentially the sources of value added products such as biodegradable films. However, they are currently utilised less than optimally and the proteins themselves are relatively under researched compared to those of cereals used in Europe and the North America. This meeting, funded by the European Union, brought together over thirty scientists from sub Saharan Africa, Europe and the United States for three days to discuss the role of sorghum and millets in Africa. The papers, as well as the discussions, were very wide ranging: the results of four European Union funded projects were presented and a wealth of experience was shared.

This Proceedings is one of the outcomes of the meeting. Another outcome of the meeting was an increased awareness of the need to share knowledge across Africa and with other parts of the world where sorghums and millets are grown. There is much knowledge that is not yet generally available and needs to be made much more available. It is hoped that as result of the exchange of ideas at the meeting that it will be possible to construct a wide ranging and widely accessible database for all those concerned with these cereals.

Science and technology will offer many possibilities for improving the yield and nutritional quality of sorghum and millet as well as some possible non-food uses all of which might contribute to increased food security and economic growth in Africa, however technology is only as good as it is relevant and sustainable. This means that activities must be firmly end use directed and will only succeed if the development is made in genuine partnership with all the stakeholders involved in production, processing and consumption. This is both the challenge and the opportunity that awaits us.

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