

Rust-resistant soya

ASIAN RUST ON SOYA BEANS IS A fungus that has had devastating effects on farmers in several continents. But now the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), in collaboration with African research institutes, has developed a soya bean variety with genes for excellent resistance.

Asian rust is caused by *Phakopsora pachyrhizi* and was identified in Africa in 1996, from where it spread rapidly to Central, Southern and Eastern Africa. It entered South America in 2001 and caused some R16 billion in crop losses in Brazil during 2003, despite application of over R3 billion worth of fungicides.

This aggressive pathogen releases billions of spores that infest soya bean foliage. Without fungicides, losses can be as high as 80%.

IITA partnered with the Makerere University in Uganda and the National Cereal Research Institute of Nigeria to breed for resistance. The resistant variety was first released in Uganda and tested in Southern Africa, where it showed excellent performance and adaptation to tropical regions.

Apart from its rust resistance, the variety exhibited good yields in grain and fodder, as well as nodulation and resistance to pod shattering.

The Nigerian government approved commercial production in 2008 and farmers will have access to seed during 2010. The variety will also be available to other countries as a source of genes to be bred into new varieties. – Wynand van der Walt (wynandjvdw@telkomsa.net).

• Source: IITA, June 2009. |fw