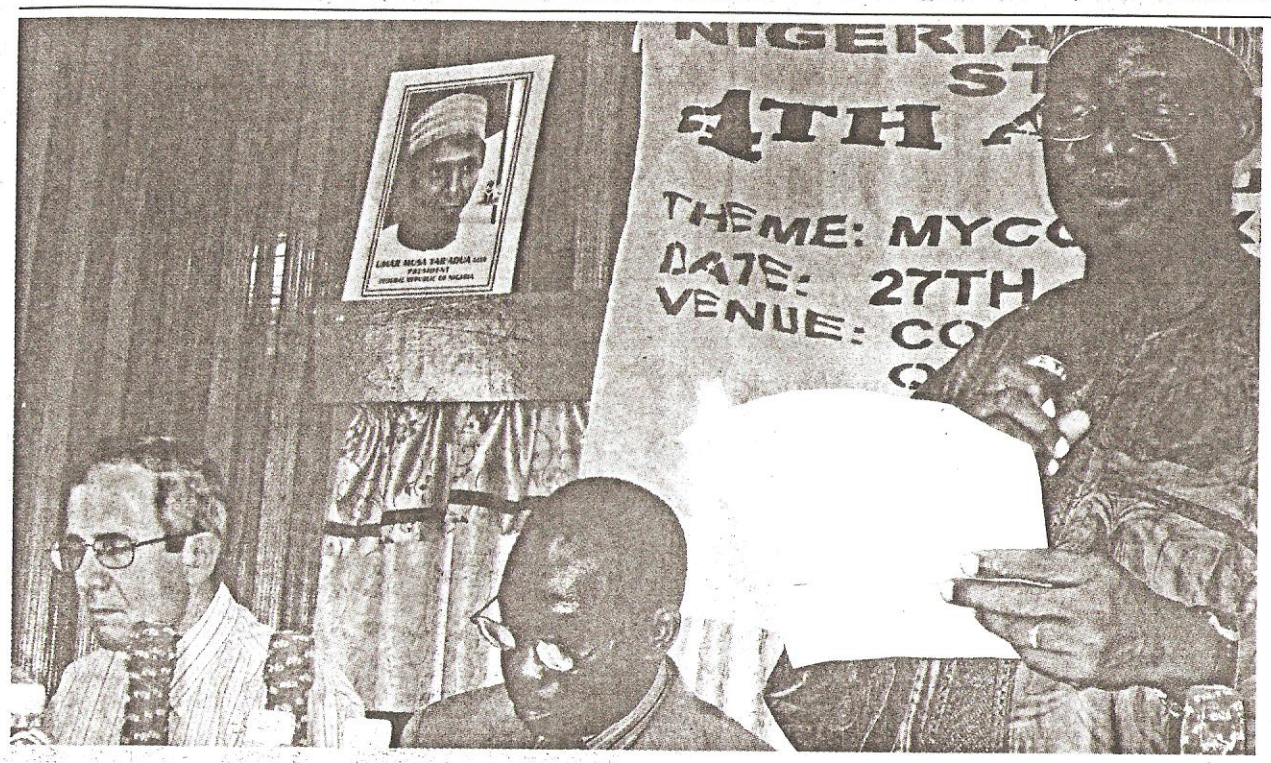

Dr. Peter Cotty (left) and Mr. Funso Akilapa listening to an address read by the executive director of the Nigerian Agricultural Quarantine Service (NAQS), DR. Mamman Magaji, at the opening ceremony of the fourth annual conference on mycotoxins organised by the Nigerian Mycotoxin Awareness Study Network (NMASN) at NAQS headquarters, Apata, Ibadan ... last Monday.

PHOTO: OLUKAYODE OYELEYE

Minister Recognises How Mycotoxins Affect Human Health, Trade

By Olukayode Oyeleye

THE MINISTER of Agriculture and Water Resources, Sayyadi Abba Ruma, has on Monday, declared that mycotoxins in agricultural products "present serious food safety and food security challenges and have serious economic implications on international trade.

This was a statement from the speech read on his behalf by Funso Akilapa, a director in the ministry, read at the opening ceremony of the fourth Mycotoxin Conference, called Quarantine 2009, organised by Nigerian Mycotoxin Awareness Network (NMASN), which took place at the Nigerian Agricultural Quarantine Service (NAQS), Ibadan, last week.

The minister's speech indicated that mycotoxin monitoring and prevention strategy would be developed along with other key regulatory agencies in the ministry of health to bring mycotoxin contamination to acceptable limits. This, according to him, "involved the application and storage of cereal, public enlightenment and technical expertise on a continuous and sustainable basis."

Mr. Akilapa explained further that "our farmers should be well briefed at farm level on how to store their products. On various control measures for mycotoxin in order to safeguard consumers' health and export potentials, Akilapa promised that "that is what the ministry (of agriculture) will now be doing. Weill incorporate this control issue into our policy." Executive director of NAQS, Dr. Mamman Magaji, underscored the need to minimise the level of mycotoxins in our agricultural produce, saying "we get a lot of alert information from overseas countries whenever Nigeria exports agricultural products. He lamented the inadequacy of facilities to guard against this occurrence. "We don't have enough capacity in terms of facilities," Magaji Said, promising that, "this year, we will see if we can buy those facilities which can help us detect mycotoxins."

National president of NMASN, Professor Dele Fapohunda, lamented that the level of research on mycotoxin is low "due to low level of interest, knowledge and awareness." He recalled that, as far back as 1988, "the aflatoxin issue has been on the front burner" of a national agency. "If we have started (something) by then, the level of awareness must have increased and effort (to this end) increased." He expressed worries that "some of the regulatory agencies are not well equipped in the area of analysis. He remarked, however, that, after last year's conference, the federal government has procured eight HPLC machines for the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON).

Dr. Antonio Logrieco, a renown scientist and vice president of International Society for Mycotoxicology, stated two possible levels of cooperation with Nigeria in the fight against mycotoxins. "We can stimulate a network at the continental level, starting with NMASN. At the second level, however, he said MYCORED will organise six to seven training courses for students from developing countries that are MYCORED partners, of which Nigeria is a member.

Mufutau Babatunde, a farmer from a village near Abeokuta, told The Guardian that, although he has not had any losses from fungal spoilage(in a language he could understand), he had gained something from last Monday's enlightenment. He said if infected seeds are planted, the product might not turn out good.

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