Regional Policy Dialogue on advocating for Conservation Agriculture policies in southern Africa

Background:

Introduction:
Southern Africa is a water-stressed region. This is exacerbated by climate change, high levels of soil degradation, soil erosion and a decline in soil fertility. In a region characterized by poverty, the need to boost and sustain productivity is critical. A potential solution to the problem is Conservation Agriculture (CA).

But, what is Conservation Agriculture (CA)?
CA involves managing agro-ecosystems to achieve higher sustained productivity, increased profits and food security without compromising the environment. This is based on three principles:

- **Minimum soil disturbance** - where crops are planted in unploughed soils, thus not disturbing the soil in terms of organic matter, loss of top soil and preventing soil erosion, thus minimizing soil water loss.

- **Permanent soil cover** - crop residues are retained in the field as mulch and/or cover crops are grown throughout the year. The soil is protected and water retention is optimized.

- **Crop associations and rotations** - Crops are planted in different associations and rotations with one another in space and over time. This method controls pests and diseases and assists in improving soil structure.
Why should the region be concerned about CA?

Agricultural production is the basis for development in a region where more than 70% of the population and the majority of the poor are engaged in rain-fed agriculture with low production levels. CA can contribute to alleviating the constraints to agriculture, i.e.

- Climate change, including droughts and floods
- Poor land use management practices
- Low production yields

What are the benefits of adopting CA?

- Increased and stabilized crop yields and improved food security
- Crops resistant to drought
- Improved soil health
- Reduced labour and production costs
- Reduced land degradation
- Environmental protection
- Stimulation of rural development and its economies

What are the challenges of CA?

- Necessary policy support to convert to CA practice
- Limited knowledge of CA principles, practice and benefits
- Production constraints, such as weed control
- Access to funds for investment in CA
- Lack of suitable equipment and input/output markets
- Policy institutions that support CA

The Dialogue:

The Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have organized a regional policy dialogue to discuss emerging Conservation Agriculture policy issues and development challenges in the southern African region. The dialogue will be attended by senior experts from the agricultural sector, major think tanks and the academia of the region.
The objectives of the Conservation Agriculture dialogue are to:

1. Share and build on best practices derived mainly from national and regional level experiences; and
2. Develop specific recommendations for helping national and regional bodies put CA more firmly into policy processes.

When : 3 May 2011
Where : Agricultural Research Council, Institute of Agricultural Engineering, Weavind Park, Silverton, Pretoria
Time : 8h30- 16h00
RSVP : Email: CNamome@fanrpan.org
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Media opportunities:

Refer to the attached programme. If you require any interviews with the speakers, please contact me.

High profile officials will be present and they can also be interviewed.

Join in and discuss burning issues.

A media pack will be distributed to journalists.