

NATIONAL MAIZE CULTIVAR EVALUATION TRIALS SEED PACKING AT FABI

A team of students and interns from the Tree Protection Co-operative Programme (TPCP) and DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Plant Health Biotechnology (CPHB) in FABI, and under the leadership of Prof. Martin Coetzee, took on the mammoth task of packaging a large number maize seed cultivars during the week of 18-22 September. The selected cultivars will be used in the 2020/21 National Maize Cultivar Trials (NMCT) in South Africa.



The NMCT is an annual maize cultivar evaluation project and its purpose is to use the most promising cultivars from all institutions and seed companies involved in the maize industry. Reliable cultivars are identified from the results of these trials. These are introduced into the South African seed market to replace older cultivars or to introduce new entries with desirable traits. The NMCT will therefore aid in providing information to maize farmers when selecting cultivars that will be better adapted to the conditions where they are grown and thereby increase their yield.

The seed-packing team comprised 33 FABIans, with 24 assisting daily with the packaging. The FABI students came with a positive attitude and their sleeves rolled up and ready for duty! They repackaged more than 1,000kg of maize seed into 2420 smaller bags that will be used in eight different regions at about 80 agro-ecological localities across the country during the NMCT. The eight regions will include Water Table (northern Free State), Western Parts (North West), Temperate Eastern (southern Mpumalanga), Cool Eastern (central Mpumalanga), Eastern Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and the Northern Cape.

One of the highlights of this project was the impeccable teamwork and collaboration skills demonstrated by the seed-packing team. Their teamwork was especially noted during the first hours of the first day when the FABI students and staff met to devise a plan of action that will allow for the most efficient and accurate strategy of packing the seeds. Once a working plan was set in motion, everyone understood their role in the project. As a result, the packing of thousands of smaller bags ran smoothly and efficiently, providing an opportunity to develop a protocol for future seed-packing projects.



We sincerely thank everyone who participated in this important project in partnership with GrainSA and the South African National Seed Organization (SANSOR). This project is funded by the Maize Trust.