

## Editorial .....

# Tackling aflatoxins in agricultural produce crucial to healthy diets

**T**here are many different types of moulds and fungus which can grow in food, including various species of mycotoxins; but aflatoxin has gained attention more than most others, because studies have found clear evidence of its potential for causing carcinogenic effects.

The consumption of 'staple crops' that can contain aflatoxin, such as corn and peanuts, is widespread globally, and even a small amount of aflatoxin in the food supply can wind up spreading and causing problems.

The country's national umbrella-body of farmer organisations, the Ghana Federation of Agricultural Producers (GFAP), has also raised concerns about the high levels of aflatoxins in agricultural produce, particularly maize and groundnuts which are common staples.

In a release, GFAP said the high levels of aflatoxins in agricultural produce has been the main problem confronting farmers, and this prevents them from meeting both local and international food safety standards - which limits their market access and affects incomes of producers.

In view of the above, the BUSAC Fund generously funded GFAP to conduct research into aflatoxins, which showed high levels of aflatoxins in crops like maize and groundnuts due to poor storage and drying of fresh produce.

Typically, there are agro-chemicals like Aflasafe GH02 developed by International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Nigeria, but storage and post-harvest handling is largely responsible for the development of aflatoxins in grains.

Therefore, we believe the farmers should be properly schooled in post-harvest handling of grains - and particularly the moisture level of warehouses where the grains are stored; or even the local storage methods must be improved upon to prevent the moulds developing.

Unfortunately, many of our rural folk and even some city dwellers believe the grains affected by aflatoxins can be consumed with little adverse consequences to human health - and how wrong they are, because studies have proved to the contrary.

Possible long-term effects of aflatoxins include damage to the digestive organs, including the liver and kidneys; and possibly a higher risk for liver cancer, viral hepatitis (HBV) or parasite infestation. Unfortunately, rural dwellers, farmers and the bulk of our people know very little about the toxic consequences of aflatoxins.

We believe heightened sensitisation will allow them to better comprehend the consequences, and in this extension officers can be of great assistance - but the problem here is that they are in short supply. We cannot afford to jeopardise the health of our people due to ignorance.