



CocoaSoils Newsletter: January 2018

Dear all,

The workshop in Utrecht is now almost three months past, and many things have happened since. We felt that an update from our side was long overdue. As we speak, a logo is being designed and a website is under construction, so soon all information will also be retrievable online. Until then, we will just provide you with an overview of what has happened so far.

NORAD funding was approved

On 11 December 2017, the NORAD funding was approved. This means the program has officially started on 1 January 2018. An online launch will be organized once the website is up and running, to share the programme's outline and detail with the wider public. This is also where the video interviews from the Utrecht workshop will feature!

Core trial planning

The first two companies have confirmed to carrying out trials in Ecuador and Côte d'Ivoire, and are very eager to get started. We are in the process of engaging with the trial agronomists and finalising the nursery protocols. At least two more companies are working on getting their trials approved.

Meanwhile slow-release fertilisers for the nurseries can be made available to those who are interested. We will not prescribe the use of specific fertiliser blends or sources in the protocols, but we do encourage companies to contact us if they are interested in ordering fertilisers for their nurseries.

Protocol setup

Based on the core trial layout and the GAP discussed in the workshop in Utrecht, we are working on a set of technical protocols. Finalising the nursery protocol is particularly urgent, and has a high priority. Please feel free to share protocols or suggestions on the technical aspects of the core trials with us; all input is welcome. In addition to the protocols, we are working with a team of statisticians at WUR to improve the core trial design, within the given number of treatments. The statistics team indicated that there may be space to increase the nutrient rates from four to five by picking the replications more strategically. They are also looking at suitable blocking strategies.

PhD and Postdoc advertisements

Four PhD advertisements have been sent out just before the Christmas holidays. The applications closed on Saturday, and we received about 110 letters in total. Candidates from all the four African project countries have applied, as well as candidates from Zimbabwe, Benin, Kenya, Egypt, and Gambia. The selection process will start in the coming week.

In addition to the PhD advertisements, two Postdoc advertisements were also launched. We ask for your help to circulate the advertisements as widely as possible.

Planning and action points

In the coming months we will continue with the work above. In March the nurseries for the 2018 experiments in Africa need to be established, and the maize homogeneity crop needs to be sown. For this reason, the nursery protocols need to be finalised in February at the latest. A project office (including a communications office) is being set up at IITA in Ghana; recruitment is about to start. The Consortium Agreement is being drafted which will outline roles and responsibilities of all partners concerned. Contract agreements between IITA and its sub-contractors are in process and will be finalised in the coming weeks. After that, national project launches will be planned in the different participating countries.

Best regards,
The CocoaSoils team

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