



Sabina Khoza  
Johannesburg, South Africa

## A fair deal for future farmers

Sabina Khoza, one of South Africa's most successful agricultural entrepreneurs, trains future farmers how to grow crops sustainably. She learned about plant biotechnology in 2002 and decided to plant insect-resistant maize alongside conventional maize on her own farm. After enjoying a 27% increase in yield, she became an enthusiastic promoter of the technology, teaching young farmers and her peers about its value.

Sabina Khoza grew up in a large family in Pretoria, South Africa. She initially knew little about farming, but after taking a farming course she bought a farm near Johannesburg in 1989. Today, Mrs. Khoza, who is among South Africa's top poultry producers, now runs the Fair Deal Agricultural Training Centre, where she trains small-scale farmers in "agricultural life skills."

After she moved to the farm with her husband and four children, Mrs. Khoza and the nearly dozen experienced farm workers who worked for the previous owners of the farm began raising chickens and then started growing vegetables using the manure produced by the chickens as fertilizer. Eventually, they built a profitable vegetable market.

In 2002, with the farm flourishing, Mrs. Khoza and her expanding team were eager to share their experience and knowledge with others. She turned her farm into

## Fair Deal Agricultural Training Centre

- **Nationally-accredited agricultural skills training centre**
- **Founded by Sabina Khoza in 2003**
- **Location: Zuurbekom, South Africa**
- **Motto: “Education with Production”**
- **Teaches sustainable farming practices**
- **Introduces biotechnology**
- **Nearly 2,000 farmers trained so far**

an agricultural training and education centre known as Fair Deal. Since the first course was offered in 2003, more than 1,800 future farmers – the majority of them women from low-income families – have gathered at the centre to learn from Mrs. Khoza and her team. Trainees learn how to farm sustainably with limited resources using good agricultural practices: where to buy seeds, soil preparation, planting, growing, fertilizing, pest control, irrigation, and marketing.

The same year Mrs. Khoza founded Fair Deal, she saw a billboard that made her curious about plant biotechnology. “I became very inquisitive,” she said, and learned that she could grow maize that would be resistant to the stalk borer, a common and destructive pest. She wondered if this claim would prove to be true on her own farm.

“I didn’t believe what the scientists told me – I wanted to see for myself,” Mrs. Khoza recalled. “I said, ‘let me try it.’” She was given the opportunity to plant a pest-resistant biotech maize crop, with the requirement that she also grow a conventional maize crop for comparison. She did, and the biotech crop produced a 27% higher yield. Neighbors noticed her success and asked her for information about this new technology. Many farmers came to Fair Deal to see the thriving biotech plant crops.

“Farmers were unaware of plant biotechnology,” Mrs. Khoza said. In 2003, Fair Deal added a course to instruct trainees about biotechnology—how it works and how to use it effectively. The effort was supported by AfricaBio, a non-profit association in South Africa that provides information about the science, safety and products of biotechnology. AfricaBio helped with the creation of training documents in all 11 of South Africa’s languages.

“I felt people should really know this technology and what it can do for them,” Mrs. Khoza said.

“We’re trying to spread this information to illiterate people,” Mrs. Khoza said. “I tell them, ‘Make your own case study. Plant it and compare it with your conventional crops.’ Once they do that, they see.”

After Mrs. Khoza grew her second successful biotech crop, she decided to lease more land from the govern-

ment. In 2006, she began planting herbicide-tolerant biotech maize, and got a 65% improvement in yield versus conventional maize.

“Herbicide-tolerant maize is a big time saver,” Mrs. Khoza said. “We don’t have to hand-weed the crop anymore.” She now plants three farms – 24 hectares of pest-resistant biotech maize, seven hectares of herbicide-tolerant biotech maize, and three hectares of conventional maize (the South African government currently requires farmers who grow biotech crops to set aside an area for planting conventional seed).

Mrs. Khoza has won numerous awards. Mabel Makibelo, a judge for the Shoprite Checkers Women of the Year awards, said Ms. Khoza “...shows an extremely encouraging spirit of entrepreneurship by empowering community members.” Some of the awards have included money, which Mrs. Khoza invests back into the Fair Deal Agricultural Training Center.

Mrs. Khoza also serves on the boards of numerous agricultural and business organisations. She has served as president of the Gauteng Provincial Farmers Union and as secretary general of the National African Farmers’ Union.

On the subject of plant biotechnology, Mrs. Khoza said “It changed my life, and the lives of my employees and my students. We use the maize to make our own food. It has uplifted my children’s lives, and my grandchildren’s lives, and my surrounding community.”

## Plant Biotech in South Africa

**Biotech cotton, maize, and soybeans are grown commercially in South Africa, resulting in higher crop yields.\* Over 90% of the cotton, 79% of the soybeans and 45% of the maize grown nationwide comes from biotech seeds. South Africa grows more biotech crops than any other African nation.\*\***

**Biotechnology products under development in South Africa include:**

- **Fungal-resistant strawberries, to improve fruit quality**
- **Insect-resistant sugar cane, to prevent Eldana damage in sugar cane fields**
- **Fungal-resistant maize and sorghum**

**Field trials of drought-tolerant biotech maize are underway.\*\*\***

\* Gruère, Guillaume P. et al. Biosafety at the crossroads: An analysis of South Africa’s marketing and trade policies for genetically modified products. 2008. International Food Policy Research Institute.

\*\* ibid

\*\*\*AfricaBio