PROJECT TITLE: ZIMBABWE PUBLIC-PRIVATE SECTION ADOPTION OF AFLATOXIN RISK MANAGEMENT TO IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY AND SAFETY AND REDUCE TECHNICAL TRADE BARRIERS

Report on the High-Level Breakfast Sensitization Meeting: Aflatoxin Risk Management Strategy for Zimbabwe

Hyatt Hotel
Harare, Zimbabwe

30 October 2025

Mukayi T. Musarurwa (Dr)

Table of Contents:

1. Context:

Currently, no millers/food processing firms in Zimbabwe participate in the Aflatoxin Proficiency Testing and Control in Africa (APTECA) proficiency testing (PT) program. The project seeks to address the increasingly large role played by these enterprises in procurement of grains and other staples and the associated aflatoxin risk in grains in Zimbabwe.

During the period 18-21 August 2025, a Team from Texas A&M Agrilife Research and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), undertook a fact-finding engagement mission to Zimbabwe to generate interest/participation in a public-private sector system to manage aflatoxin risk. Key Government Ministry officials at the Permanent Secretary level were met as well as executive level representatives from private milling companies at their premises. Both the public and private sectors expressed great interest in the implementation of an aflatoxin risk management strategy for the country. Key recommendations for the next steps (Phase II) were as follows:

- High level sensitization workshop for the broader stakeholder group in the country (Government Ministries and their specialized technical Institutions; private sector milling and feed companies)
- Training workshop on aflatoxin measurement and analyst qualification, for laboratory staff from milling and feed companies.

2. Objective:

- Develop a strategy to achieve adoption of an aflatoxin risk management program by Zimbabwe
- Hold a high-level sensitization workshop for a broader stakeholder group in the country (Government Ministries and their specialized technical Institutions; private sector milling and feed companies)
- Conduct a training workshop on aflatoxin measurement and analyst qualification using performance verified aflatoxin test kits and reference material, for laboratory staff from milling and feed companies.

3. High level Breakfast Sensitization Session

3.1 Opening Session:

The high-level breakfast sensitization session was held at the Hyatt-Meikles hotel, Harare, on 30 October 2025. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water, and Rural Development, Ministry of Health and Childcare, and

Ministry of Industry and Commerce; Government Agencies; and private sector milling companies. The full list of attendees is attached as Annex 2.
The COMESA representative welcomed the participants to the meeting and invited them to introduce themselves.

During the opening session and in the spirit of a ***One Health Approach***, the Ministries present gave brief remarks on aflatoxin risk management in Zimbabwe. The Permanent Secretary for Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, represented by the Ministry's Chief Director - Dr Claud Mujaju – opened the workshop and gave a keynote speech hby reminding the gathering about the challenge that ***is as silent as it is significant*** from the threat of Aflatoxins in our food and feed systems. He emphasized that the workshop was not merely a scientific or technical convening; but rather a ***national call to collective action to safeguard public health.***

The PS commended the commitment by COMESA and Texas A&M Agrilife Research to capacity building, particularly in laboratory quality systems, mycotoxin proficiency testing, and the provision of reference materials and training programs. These interventions have not only enhanced the accuracy and reliability of our national testing systems but have also strengthened Zimbabwe's position in regional and international trade by ensuring our agricultural exports meet global safety standards. Zimbabwe values especially the ongoing training of laboratory analysts using performance-verified aflatoxin test kits. These are practical, sustainable interventions. The PS further commended the inclusive nature of the project through its focus on private sector, particularly in the milling and feed manufacturing industries, since food safety cannot be achieved by government alone. The private sector — as the primary producer, processor, and distributor of food products — must play a central role in ensuring compliance with safety standards and in adopting aflatoxin management best practices.

PS Jiri noted further that addressing aflatoxin contamination is not a peripheral issue — it is fundamental to achieving our vision of safe, competitive, and resilient agricultural systems. Establishment of a national Aflatoxin Risk Management Program — in partnership with COMESA and Texas A&M Agrilife Research and our local institutions — will provide a coordinated framework to:

1) Strengthen surveillance and monitoring systems for food and feed safety
2) Standardize analytical procedures through participation in regional proficiency testing
3) Build a cadre of qualified analysts and inspectors; and
4) Promote awareness and adoption of preventive measures among farmers, millers, and feed manufacturers.

PS Jiri further noted that the meeting was a crucial milestone as brought together government, research institutions, academia, and industry to chart a collective path forward.

In his concluding remarks, PS Jiri, under the theme of a shared responsibility for a safer future, reaffirmed the Government of Zimbabwe's full commitment to this initiative. ***We will continue to collaborate with COMESA, Texas A&M Agrilife Research Institute, and all our partners in advancing laboratory excellence, harmonising regional standards, and embedding aflatoxin management into our national food safety architecture***.

He emphasized the need to remain guided by the shared vision of: A Zimbabwe where every household has access to safe and nutritious food; A private sector that drives compliance through innovation and quality assurance; and a regional system that ensures trade without compromise to public health. “Together, through science, partnership, and strong leadership, we can make aflatoxin risk management an integral part of Zimbabwe’s agricultural transformation story”.

3.2 Presentations

Dr Mukayi Musarurwa (COMESA Secretariat) gave a presentation highlighting some of the region’s current activities on aflatoxin risk management activities, including the collaboration with Texas A&M Agrilife Research on the APTECA Programme; the Laboratory Quality Management training course; the Mutual Recognition Agreement for Conformity Assessment; and. the Regional Grading Curriculum and Regional Proficiency Grading Scheme.

Dr Melody Ndemera (Harare Institute of Technology) presentation highlighted the impact of aflatoxin on Animal/Human health and Trade, and how emerging food and feed safety risks increase the disease burden for Zimbabwe and other African countries. “We know that there are aflatoxins in our food but we are not sure about the level of the spoke about the risk and quantities involved”.

Prof TIM Herrman (Texas A&M Agrilife Research) gave an overview of the Aflatoxin Proficiency Testing and Control in Africa (APTECA) Programme which Texam has been implementing since 2014. APTECA is a public-private partnership which manages aflatoxin risk through a connected and transparent marketplace that delivers aflatoxin safe food and feed to countries in Africa. Its objectives include: facilitate adoption of a quality systems approach by laboratories to accurately measure aflatoxin and other mycotoxins; work with small holder farmers, informal sector, and formal sector to identify gaps in aflatoxin risk management and deliver affordable systems to test and control aflatoxin; deliver a global aflatoxin proficiency testing service including the production and sale of aflatoxin testing reference material; and formalize a public-private partnership that facilitates policy solutions and communicates solutions to manage aflatoxin risk. Prof Tim also covered related topics on roles and responsibilities within A Quality Management System; Texas Aflatoxin Co-Regulation Program; Quality Systems Approach; Proficiency Testing (one of the big 3 along with uncertainty and traceability), and development of a written APTECA Food Safety plan by Zimbabwe milling and feed companies; establishment of a national steering body as well as a national marketing campaign; incorporation of the Zimbabwe aflatoxin risk management strategy into national food safety policies/strategies.

Ann Muiruri, Program Coordinator, APTECA (Texas A&M AgriLife Research) provided an overview of the Aflatoxin Measurement and Analyst Qualification workshop for Zimbabwe. The objective of the two-day technical practical in-lab training course is to enhance participant competence in aflatoxin testing methods using two lateral flow and ELISA-based systems — the Neogen Veratox and Reveal Q+, and Prognosis Quantum Green & Bioshield ELISA kits.

3.3 Discussion/Next steps

Summary clarification on the APTECA Programme:

a) APTECA focuses on managing risk through:
- Technology and policy solutions,
- Analyst qualification and continuing education,
- Proficiency testing and reference material programs
- Quality system operation (record-keeping, management, verification)
- Cost analysis and marketing

b) APTECA partnerships:
- National institutions including universities, experiment stations, associations, government agencies, test kit providers, and those institutions that help eliminate trade barriers.

c) APTECA cuts across market sectors
- Work in Zimbabwe began August 2025 and it expected to progress over the few years as illustrated in the Zimbabwe milestones below.

4. APTECA Milestones for Zimbabwe

Activity	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Assessment of private sector needs	Meetings, needs assessment			
Technical Development of the Private Sector	--	Private sector aflatoxin testing workshops		
APTECA Implementation	--	--	--	Evaluate adoption by private sector
Marketing	--	--	Pilot marketing Adoption of logo	National marketing
Path to sustainability	--	Itemize costs	--	Stakeholder meeting to plan a self-sustaining path forward

5. Meeting closure

As part of its closing remarks, COMESA thanked all the public and private sector officials as well as Texas A&M Agrilife and HIT for their role in the successful sensitization session of aflatoxin risk management programme for Zimbabwe. COMESA reiterated the need for Zimbabwe to drive the process for the adoption and domestication of an aflatoxin risk management programme in its policy framework in order to ensure sustainability of the initiative after closure of the support from COMESA and Texas A&M Agrilife Research.

Texas A&M Agrilife Research also thanked all the stakeholders for their role in the session and reminded the milling companies about the Qualification training session of their analysts starting the following day for two days.

The three Government Ministries gave a vote of thanks to COMESA, Texas Agrilife, and HIT for arranging, knowledge sharing on aflatoxin risk management as well as providing a road-map for Zimbabwe.

6. Annexes:

Annex 1: Meeting Programme
Annex 2: List of participants
Annex 3: Link for all Presentations