

Confined Field Trials FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



What are confined field trials and why are they needed?

Confined field trials (CFT) are field experiments carried out to evaluate the performance of genetically modified (GM) plants. They are an essential step for technology assessment and development. CFTs are carried out under stringent terms and conditions that confine the experimental material. They are similar to field experiments done for conventional breeding, but plant material and genes are confined to a limited area.



What is the difference between contained and confined trials?

Both are research experiments. However, 'contained' refers to being enclosed within a container such as a laboratory or greenhouse while 'confined field trials' means that genes and plant material are kept (confined) in a specific area usually a small piece of land demarcated for the experiment.

What is the purpose of carrying out CFT?

As a research experiment, CFTs are carried out to test GM plants under real field conditions and to test the value of the trait in local environment. The trials are also used to breed biotech traits into local varieties and to enable selection of the best lines and eventual scaling-up of production material, prior to regulatory approval for commercialisation. CFTs also serve to generate safety data needed for subsequent risk assessment and approval.

How are confined field trials different from a commercial release?

CFTs are carried out as part of research experiments and are confined in a small area with good control, restricted access and movement of the plant materials. Commercial release on the other hand is carried out after all safety tests and evaluations have been carried out and the product is ready for deployment to the public.

What are the key elements in ensuring successful CFTs?

Successful CFTs are guided by and must strictly adhere to the terms and conditions described in the approved permit to conduct the confined field trial.

For it to succeed, it must ensure plant material confinement, genetic confinement and prevent persistence. Plant material confinement is ensured by preventing mixing of trial seed with others, consumption of the material and escape into the environment. Genetic confinement is attained by ensuring prevention of pollen-mediated gene flow. Appropriate confinement also requires good practices for material and genetic confinement. This involves training and equipping trial personnel, ensuring good record keeping and documentation and regular inspection and monitoring by the project personnel and regulatory authority.

Can material and genetic confinement be achieved?

Science-based confinement measures and adequate inspections have ensured the safe conduct of confined field trials of GM crops worldwide.

Since 1987, more than 15,000 field trials have been conducted in over 50 countries. There is not a single documented example of harm to humans, animals, or the environment arising from a confined field trial or from the commercial deployment of a GM crop.

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P.O. Box 30709-00100, Nairobi, Kenya | Tel: 254-(0)20-422 3700 | Fax: 254-(0)20-422 3701 | Email: aatf@aatf-africa.org | www.aatf-africa.org