UNIVERSITY OF EMBU

SPEECH BY

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WAMBUA CHANCELLOR,

UNIVERSITY OF EMBU DURING

THE AGRICULTURAL

BIOTECHNOLOGY FORUM

HELD AT

THE UNIVERSITY OF EMBU

ON

WEDNESDAY, 29TH MARCH, 2017

- The Acting Vice Chancellor;
- Members of the University Management and Senate
- Workshop Facilitators;
- University of Embu Staff and Students;
- Distinguished participants and guests;
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good Morning!

I am delighted to join you today for the workshop on Agricultural Biotechnology.

On behalf of the University Community and that of my own, I would like to extend my congratulations to the University of Embu, the National Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and the International Service for Acquisition of Agri-Biotech

Applications (ISAAA) for coming together to host this important forum. I commend you all for your excellent work and many outstanding achievements that each of you has recorded especially in the area of Agricultural Biotechnology Research and Innovation.

The Theme of this workshop – *"Demystifying Agricultural Biotechnology Through Active Engagement of Academia"* - is indeed a testimony of your commitment to ensuring that information on new innovations in Agricultural Biotechnology is widely disseminated for the benefit of Society.

We live in a world which is increasingly becoming integrated socially, technologically and economically. Global challenges such as climate change, food security and

environmental degradation continue to affect communities around the world without discrimination or exception.

The on-going drought in the country and many countries in this region reminds us that the world is changing quickly and dramatically. The challenges of climate change are real, global warming, change in rainfall patterns, dwindling water levels across the dams, lakes, rivers, and the ocean are indeed a warning call to every citizen of the world.

Agricultural production also remains vulnerable to weather fluctuations and climate change. It is, therefore, important to also identify ways to make agriculture less vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations.

This has brought about a world-wide concern because providing a growing population with food, water, shelter, and livelihoods, without further degradation of the environment is no longer a concern but a priority for Governments. Soon, if we do not adopt new technologies, we as a country might become an importer of all food that we need for our people.

To ensure food security therefore, it is important to look at new options; these options are mainly new technologies which are beneficial to farmers and acceptable to consumers. There are not many effective and sustainable technology options available to enhance agricultural growth. One option obviously is Biotechnology application to agriculture.

Biotechnology especially agricultural production has brought significant debate throughout the world in the 21st Century. I trust that today's forum will provide a direction through which such discussions will move to those with little or no information about agricultural biotechnologies. Here at the University, we believe in dispensing knowledge in order to help mitigate extreme weather conditions, loss of agricultural produce and famine that continues to ravage many parts of this country and the world at large.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Developing innovative and effective biotechnological solutions to problems

encountered by people in health, environment and in agriculture is a pressing challenge faced by today's researchers. There is a need for cutting-edge research and development efforts in biotechnology and new strategic partnerships in this important interdisciplinary field.

As Kenya strives to achieve Vision 2030 and sustainable development goals (SDGs), it is imperative that research and development in sciences and agriculture is enhanced. This is an ambitious, transformational agenda for the country, designed to turn Kenya into a developed, industrialized, competitive, sustainable and socially inclusive economy that can sustain its growing population and ensure prosperity for current and future generations.

In this regard, Research and innovation must therefore be at the very core of the Vision 2030 and the only way to deliver new sources of sustainable growth.

This is in recognition that these elements play a critical role in enhancing knowledge, developing novel products and boosts the status of a country through contribution to solving the world's unique problems. One of the many technologies available today is agricultural biotechnology. Advances in agricultural biotechnology have shown increased crop yields, allowing farmers utilize limited resources to maintain a certain level of production. Biotechnology crops can be planted and harvested with little or no use of pesticides, a result that protects the

environment from the exposure to sometimes harsh chemicals. These are just to mention but a few.

The development of this technology in Kenya is still at early stages. The regulatory mechanisms have been established and the technology has become the target of a very intensive and, at times, emotionally charged debate. I trust this forum will provide a neutral ground aimed at promoting meaningful discussions, dialogues and exchanges of information on agricultural biotechnology. This is in consideration of the fact that information is power; and perhaps the obstacle in the contemporary societies is searching for credible sources of information.

The foundation and strength of science is fact. Results based on well corroborated evidences are the ingredients upon which scientists build their arguments and it is what they seek from each other. I trust that debates and ultimate decisions to be made are related to scientific matters and are based on the most reliable information based on concrete results.

This workshop cannot have come at a better time because it aims to bringing together academicians, farmers, youth groups, students and scientist to discuss various aspects of agricultural biotechnology and provide a diverse perspective on the developments in agricultural biotechnology research and innovations as well as in the new and emerging fields of biotechnology and how they are presenting new opportunities to food

production, challenges and sustainability of the technologies.

I therefore urge our scientists, policy makers, farmers, youth and all the stakeholders to take advantage of this forum as an opportunity for sharing knowledge and educating the public.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion

Once again, I must thank you for inviting me to this forum. I am delighted to be here with you today to share in this discussion of a technological revolution that is sweeping across the world.

I am confident that the conversations and ideas that will be exchanged between the various professionals, farmers, youths and stakeholders represented here today will only

further our understanding of Agricultural Biotechnology for betterment of our society.

We have excellent speakers and I'm sure we will have fruitful discussions and constructive recommendations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With those remarks, it is now my humble pleasure to declare the Agricultural Biotechnology Forum at the University of Embu, on this day - Thursday, 30th March 2017 – **OFFICIALLY OPEN.**

Thank you.

Professor Paul Musili Wambua
Chancellor, University of Embu