



PHOTOGRAPH BY KATE ESHELBY

AFRICAN FARMERS SAY NO TO GM COTTON

Ordinary cotton-growers and other farmers have voted against introducing genetically modified crops in a novel 'citizens jury' in Mali – the world's fourth poorest country and the largest producer of cotton in sub-Saharan Africa.

To arrive at their decision the jurors cross-examined 14 international witnesses including scientists, agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization, and farmers from South Africa and India with first-hand experience of growing GM crops.

After reviewing the evidence the jurors proposed a package of recommendations to strengthen traditional agricultural practice and support local

farmers. Though not binding, the jurors' decision is expected to influence the future direction of agricultural policy in Mali and across the region where most people rely on subsistence farming. Commenting on the event Dr Michel Pimbert, of London-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), said: 'We must all recognise that local people have the right to decide the food and farming policies they want. This citizens jury has provided a safe space for farmers to reach an informed, evidence-based view on this complicated and often controversial issue, which can then be amplified to policy-makers.'

9000

The number of pieces of space junk currently orbiting the earth. Pieces measuring four inches or more total some 5,500 tons – and scientists say there's no way, technically or economically, of cleaning it all up.

RARE BIRD REVIVAL

At least 11 rare spoon-billed sandpipers have been discovered along the coast of Bangladesh. Concern rose over the fate of these small shore birds, named for their distinctive teaspoon-shaped bills, after a 2005 expedition failed to find a single bird in their traditional winter habitat along India's east coast. The discovery raises hopes for the survival of the birds, whose population has dwindled to just 300-350 pairs in the wild.