

GMOs will not affect Uganda's 'organic crops'

GM cassava, matooke, and sweet potatoes being developed in Uganda are not organic export crops for Europe but locally consumed staples that are being improved by Ugandan scientists to make the crops resist various diseases that drastically lower their yields hence threatening national food security.

The term organic has been misused by those who barely understand the basics of crop agronomy. Organic farming is the growing of crops using organic manure and plant-based extracts as pests control methods. The biggest threat to the so called organic market in Europe is the use of inorganic pesticides in the control of pests not the planting of GM crops.

In Uganda, there was a drive to promote organic cotton growing among farmers but that led to farmers' abandonment of cotton production due to the remarkable reduction in yields caused by the happy pests that were not sprayed. The promised premium price by those who want to wear "organic shirts and skirts" could not cover the quantity lost in not spraying.

The beneficiaries of the organic fantasy are European agencies who issue certificates for organic products. They have created a false picture in the minds of their consumers that eating anything organic is healthy despite the quantity consumed and the method of processing it.

Not every organic pesticide is healthy and effective in controlling pests. Tobacco that is used in post harvest handling is known for containing cancer causing compounds that when inhaled by the user becomes very dangerous. Neem-extracts kill all kinds of insects including those conservationists call non target ones. The ants, assumed to control aphids are actually the indicator of aphids' presence because they feed on the sweet aphids' excreta not on aphids.

As human beings can not live "organically" without inorganic medication so are crops that need protection from pests and diseases. It is extreme fantasy to think eating a product from a crop that has not been sprayed with inorganic pesticide or inorganic fertilizer is eating healthy. Sugar and fats which are 100% organic are the biggest cause of obesity and diabetes. The inorganic sodium chloride that we eat daily in our foods has a considerable level of toxicity and yet our body requires it.

Organic talk and movement is a cultic market and highly capitalistic, selective and based on the vulnerability of consumers' search for health that make them cling to any promise real or not. The beneficiaries are capitalists who understand the fantasies of the rich and are afraid that the over hyped organic benefits will be diffused by GM adoption that would make them lose their organic market.

Coming back to the GM crops, every biotech crop being developed should be evaluated on its own merit just like any other conventional crop. Groundnuts have compounds that cause allergy to some people but that does not stop others from eating groundnuts or does not make all other conventionally bred crops allergenic. The same is with eggs and milk that some people are allergic too. You cannot stop others from eating eggs and drinking milk simply because they accumulate gas in their stomachs when they drink milk.

The science of applying emotions and psychology is very different from that which requires application of universal proven facts that can be replicated with consistent outcomes.

It is the mandate of the scientists to develop high yielding crop varieties which are resistant to prevailing diseases. The consumers have a choice to adopt or not to but the product must be available and ready for those who want to use it.

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