

GMO bananas enriched with vitamin A to benefit millions in Africa set for human trials in US

A super-enriched banana genetically engineered to improve the lives of millions of people in Africa will soon have its first human trial, which will test its effect on vitamin A levels, Australian researchers said.

The project plans to have the special banana varieties — enriched with alpha and beta carotene which the body converts to vitamin A — growing in Uganda by 2020. The bananas are now being sent to the United States, and it is expected that the six-week trial measuring how well they lift vitamin A levels in humans will begin soon.

“Good science can make a massive difference here by enriching staple crops such as Ugandan bananas with pro-vitamin A and providing poor and subsistence-farming populations with nutritionally rewarding food,” said project leader Professor James Dale.

The Queensland University of Technology (QUT) project, backed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, hopes to see conclusive results by year end. Dale said the Highland or East African cooking banana was a staple food in East Africa, but had low levels of micro-nutrients, particularly pro-vitamin A and iron.

“The consequences of vitamin A deficiency are dire with 650,000-700,000 children world-wide dying ... each year and at least another 300,000 going blind,” he said.

Read the full, original article: ‘Super’ banana to face first human trial