

Zimbabwe would gain from engaging in debate, rather than seeking GM food ban

Food, politics and health have once again come together in a media-friendly cocktail. Two thought-pieces with opposing views on Genetically Modified Crops were published in the Zimbabwe media over the last two weeks. One was by Dr. Edward Mabaya, a Cornell University academic, who argues for the adoption of Genetically Modified (GM) seed technology in Zimbabwe. The other is by Mr. Tobaiwa Mudede and Mr. Richard Hondo who have argued against the introduction and marketing of GM crops technology, and thus sustaining the current ban on using GM seeds.

Dr. Mabaya argues that GM foods are safe, represent an economic opportunity and are already in our food chain. As such, he reasons, preventing Zimbabwean farmers from adopting the technology is not justifiable. Mudede and Hondo, on the other hand, argue that the risks from adoption of GM crops are far too high to justify adoption in Zimbabwe. They cite medical complications that may arise from GM foods and seeds to support their argument. They also appeal to a moral/religious arguments regarding alteration of genes.

Mudede, Hondo and Mabaya are due credit for drawing public attention to this issue. The GMO debate is deeply intertwined with issues of equity, ethics, economics, health, trade and environment. If we are to imagine a more sustainable future for our Agriculture, we need to navigate this difficult terrain, hopefully using the tools that science has to offer.

Given the controversy surrounding GM technology, Zimbabwe would benefit from strengthening science capacity and building robust evidence base to enable monitoring of impacts and trends. Use of science and hard evidence represents intelligent policy making, can save lives, reduce poverty and help improve performance. The result should approximate socially optimal outcomes.

Rather than seeking to sustain the current ban, Zimbabwe stands to gain from engaging in the debate and framing the terms of its participation in the commercialisation of the technology.

Read the full, original article: GM foods and crops in Zimbabwe: A rebuttal