

## Vietnam approves GM corn as animal feed to reduce dependence on imports

Vietnamese farmers nationwide are now able to plant three varieties of genetically-modified (GM) corn from the Swiss firm Syngenta, according to a new government's rule.

The three varieties are NK66 BT, NK66 GT and NK66 BT/GT and will be supplied to corn farms nationwide with each variety being distributed to specific regions, said the decision from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Pham Dong Quang, director of the Department of Crop Production, said the three varieties can resist pest and herbicide as well as produce higher yields.

"GM corn will be used for animal feed only and thus, it does not require special labeling," he said.

Kumar Datta, Syngenta Vietnam country director, said the company will coordinate with provincial agricultural agencies on plans to widely spread the varieties for better income of the farmers.

### **'Jumping the gun'**

Those developments were in line with a 2006 ambitious plan to develop biotech crops as part of a "major program for the development and application of biotechnology in agriculture and rural development."

The plan aimed to cultivate Vietnam's first GM crops by 2015 and have 30-50 percent of the country's farmland covered with genetically modified organisms by 2020.

An increasing number of Vietnamese officials and scientists have touted the need to grow GM corn to reduce Vietnam's dependence on imports.

Vietnam currently imports 1.5 million tons of corn for feeding animals every year from Brazil, Argentina, and the US, including GM varieties, according to the agriculture ministry.

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