

Synthetic biology threatens to displace African vanilla, stevia in global market

An ongoing expansion of an extreme form of genetic engineering threatens to deny Africa its share of the global market for some of its most lucrative agricultural products.

The technology enables companies to synthetically produce some farm products more cheaply than they are produced naturally on the continent. They do this by manufacturing the basic biological ingredient of a crop (DNA), and injecting it into unrelated plants for mass production.

Some of the crops being produced through this genetic engineering are stevia, cocoa butter, artemisia and vanilla. In Africa, these crops are grown in Kenya, Uganda, Madagascar, Ghana, Comoros and Reunion Islands.

A leading multinational consumer goods company is said to be funding the synthetic production of palm oil, which may affect prices for palm oil produced in Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Other crops facing similar threats are coconut oil, which is a base for the production of oleochemicals (chemicals derived from plant fats); saffron, considered the world's most valuable spice, 90 per cent of which is produced by Iran; and vetiver oil, a fragrance used in cosmetics, on which 60,000 Haitians depend.

The rise in synthetic biology has also created international controversy pitting giant multinational biotech companies and industrial nations against developing countries and civil society groups.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the variety of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [Africa's farm products could be pushed out of global market by synthetic biology](#)