

Nigerian GM cowpea trial promising but politics blocks approval

There's a confined field trial taking place in rural Nigeria. The crop being tested is genetically modified (GM) insect-resistant cowpea, an important, high-protein, drought-tolerant food legume grown widely in the dry savannah regions of tropical Africa.

The gene that has been introduced comes from the soil [bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*](#), or Bt for short. This organism has been used as an insecticidal spray, especially by [organic farmers](#), for [years](#). It produces a toxin that is specific for the larvae of certain insects, including the damaging pod borer, [*Maruca vitrata*](#), which often devastates cowpeas.

The toxin, which is itself a protein, binds to specific cells in the lining of the guts of the susceptible larvae, punctures them, and leads to the death of the larvae. All other animals, including frogs, birds and humans, lack these gut cells so they are [immune](#) to the Bt toxin.

The results are so promising that the [African Agriculture Technology Foundation](#) is considering commercialising the crop in the next few years.

But the trial in Nigeria is unusual because few African countries allow them. GM crops are grown commercially only in South Africa, Burkina Faso and Sudan.

Why Africa is reluctant

The main reasons other countries haven't followed suit are political and economic.

The negative attitude to GM crops [found](#) in Europe, where they import GM crops such as soybeans for animal feed but do not allow their own farmers to plant it, has had a strong [influence](#) on African politicians.

The reluctance of so many African countries to GMOs is also attributed to fears about the impact it would have on trade with other countries, particularly Europe where a number of countries have banned GM imports.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [Why genetically modified crops have been slow to take hold in Africa](#)