

Investors find GM cassava unattractive, despite potential benefits for farmers, society

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[Genomics](#), an emergent [technology](#) dealing with genes, is getting cassava scientists excited about the potential of growing more cassava in a much shorter time and much more efficient way.

Scientists believe this root crop — dubbed the “poor man’s fruit” — can be the solution to feeding the booming populations of developing nations. But finding [investments](#) to fund research and development for the plant has been difficult.

Feeding more than 500 million people worldwide, cassava is a carbohydrate source that is considered a staple crop and an important [food security](#) component in developing nations.

“Genomics can shorten breeding time to develop cassava varieties much quicker,” Wilhelm Gruissem, plant biotechnology professor at ETH Zurich, tells *SciDev.Net*.

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But due to [vegetative propagation](#) — the plant is genetically identical to the parent and grows from parts of the parent plant — cassava has not been economically interesting to seed companies which cannot sell seeds of the plant. It has not found major interest either among developed nations which do not grow and consume the crop.

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Yet, the advantages of cassava over other crops are clear: it can sustain long droughts and grow in almost any type of soil. It is highly productive and semi-perennial, which gives it a flexible time window for harvesting.

The crop can be processed into hundreds of different food products and non-food products. The starch quality in cassavas is also much better than the starch quality in corn, says Gruissem.

“From my perspective, national governments have to understand the value and importance of this crop and invest in cassava research, breeding and technology,” he stresses.

Read full, original post: [Investments can propel cassava biotech](#)