

Crop losses due to disease cost Uganda hundreds of millions, biotech could help

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

Due to climate change and other factors, Uganda faces a number of agricultural challenges. New crop diseases are threatening major food crops such as cassava, bananas, and maize. And it seems other conventional preventive measures have failed.

Due to Banana Bacterial Wilt (BBW), Uganda loses \$299.6m worth of bananas annually. Uganda is Africa's leading banana producer and will lose that position if the problem continues. Over 13 million Ugandans depend on bananas for food and income. Naro has developed BBW-resistant genetically modified (GM) banana varieties.

Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD) causes an annual loss of \$24.2m. More than 10 million Ugandans consume cassava as main food and 75 per cent of farmers grow it. Naro has also developed CBSD-resistant GM cassava.

Potential yield loss due to sweet potato weevil is 98 per cent. Uganda is Africa's most important sweet potato producer but it may lose out. But adoption of GM potato could earn \$16m annually.

About 86 per cent of farmers grow maize where also Maize Stem Borer contributes to about 30 per cent loss. Drought kills maize and causes a loss of \$19.4m every year. Yet the economic benefits from adopting GM maize are estimated at \$25.4m.

Uganda consumes 175,000 metric tonnes of rice and we save \$30m by growing it ourselves. But soil-related stress has hampered production, which scientists say can be resolved if we grow low-nitrogen and drought-resistant GM rice.

Read full, original post: Should GM crops be grown in Uganda?