

Burkina Faso putting GMO cotton on hold, not abandoning it

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Activists opposed to GMOs recently claimed that Burkina Faso had “abandoned” insect-resistant GM cotton, a move that supposedly spelled doom for biotechnology throughout Africa. But reports of GM cotton’s death are also an exaggeration.

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GM cotton was commercialized in Burkina Faso in 2008. . . it rapidly gained popularity with farmers because of its ability to resist the devastating bollworm pest without the use of expensive and potential harmful pesticides. That meant the farmers who adopted GM cotton used less insecticide, while earning more profit from reduced costs and higher yields.

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. . .[A]n issue recently erupted when cotton companies rejected some of the GM crop due to its fiber length — something the anti-GMO activists latched onto and tried to inflate.

Cotton companies prefer long cotton fibers that are around 27-29mm in length. But the GM cotton grown in Burkina Faso tended to produce shorter fibers, around 25-27 mm long. Did this perhaps indicate a failure of genetic engineering technology, as the anti-GMO activists claimed?

Actually the issue is basic crop breeding, unrelated to the genetically engineered traits. When the insect-resistant traits were bred into the regional cotton varieties that Burkinabe farmers prefer, genes conveying a shorter cotton fiber length were retained from the local varieties. Over time, the proportion of short fibers outpaced the longer fibers that cotton mills desire.

Burkinabe researchers are now working with Monsanto to fully “convert” local long-fiber cotton varieties to carrying the insect-resistant trait. . . . In the interim, farmers and cotton companies agreed to temporarily halt the cultivation of GM cotton to prevent the short-fiber trait from becoming more prevalent.

Read full, original post: [Burkina Faso Puts GM Cotton on Hold](#)