Conventional breeding may be outpacing genetic engineering in creation of super crops

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Last year, [Jonathan Lynch]. . . his team at Pennsylvania State University in University Park reported that they had produced a variety of common bean. . . that . . . [takes] up phosphorus from the soil with improved efficiency. In experimental plots, the plants produced three times the bean yield of typical varieties.

. . . .

Lynch's beans are among the first successful attempts in a global race to develop crops that grow well in soils depleted of nutrients. "Low availability of nitrogen, phosphorus and water are the main limitations of plant growth on Earth. . ." says Lynch.

His work stands out because he has taken an old-school approach. He is leading a renaissance in some conventional crop-breeding techniques that rely on laboriously examining plants' physical characteristics and then selecting for desirable traits. . .

And surprisingly, this approach seems to be outpacing the high-tech route.

Big corporations . . . have spent more than a decade developing improved crops through genetic engineering. . .But there are still no fertilizer-frugal transgenic crops on the market, and several agricultural organizations around the globe are reviewing their biotechnology initiatives in this area.

Read full, original post: The race to create super-crops