

## Can we 'build' a better banana with genetic engineering?

Reproductively, domesticated banana plants are self-copying machines .... With the emergence of the 20th century, the confluence of the Industrial Revolution with plantation agriculture led to the propagation of a single globally favored banana genet (descended from a single instance of sperm-egg fusion) for export from the tropics to waiting markets in the industrial north.

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[F]rom farmer to grocer, the whole modern industrial food production and delivery stream depends on predictable uniformity.

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[S]ome plant biotechnologists have argued that future crops should follow the banana, dispensing with sex entirely. Specifically, they are titillated by the idea of varieties that replicate the maternal plant via reliably uniform, asexual, apomictic seed. One proposal .... would be to genetically engineer plants to be apomictic ....

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[A]sexual seed could be a real boon to farmers—or not. Some scientists see social justice in apomictic seed .... A clonal crop is genetically very uniform. That's both the good news and the bad news because, despite its tremendous popularity, the Gros Michel [banana variety] is nearly gone .... because, according to banana geneticist and crop evolutionist N. W. Simmonds, "bananas constitute one of the best examples in the history of agriculture of the pathological perils of monoclonal culture."

**[Editor's note: This article is an excerpt from [Sex on the Kitchen Table: The Romance of Plants and Your Food](#) by Norman C. Ellstrand.]**

Read full, original article: [What's Wrong with Bananas](#)