

## Kenyan small farmers look to genetically engineered disease resistant cassava to improve food security

Catherine Taracha, a scientist at the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (Kalro), is looking forward to starting planting genetically modified (GM) cassava on a trial basis after the government recently approved the process.

“We will do the trials in Western Kenya, at the Coast and in the Eastern part,” Taracha said Monday during a virtual meeting in Nairobi, expressing optimism that in two year’s time, farmers across the country and other parts of East Africa would start growing the crop commercially.

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In Kenya, only 970,000 tonnes of cassava are produced annually, and this is because of diseases like cassava mosaic and brown streak as well as pests like whiteflies and mealybugs.

For millions of farmers across East Africa, the cassava mosaic disease was a real problem in the mid-1990s as it spread like bush fire in the region, causing over 80 percent yield losses.

Annual yield losses due to the disease are estimated at 7 billion shillings (about 65 million U.S. dollars) in East and Central Africa, according to Taracha.

“We are banking on the GM crop to boost this crop. There is a huge market for cassava because of its huge potential,” she said.

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