

Rwanda uses biotech potato variety to fight same blight that caused Irish Potato Famine — saving 80% of potatoes

Late blight, a potentially devastating disease affecting potatoes and tomatoes, infecting leaves, stems, potato tubers and tomato fruits, spreads quickly in fields and can result in total crop failure if untreated.

According to the International potato Centre (CIP), in East Africa, the disease can destroy as much as 60-100 per cent of the crop.

The CIP scientists working with Rwanda are using bioengineering to transfer resistance genes from wild potato relatives into varieties that are already popular with farmers and consumers so as to fight the disease.

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“The disease erodes 80 per cent of expected produce if a farmer has no financial capacity to afford required agro-chemicals. It affects the crop during rainy seasons which are also seasons for growing potatoes,” Apollinaire Karegeya, a farmer in Musanze District, told Doing Business.

Karegeya grows Irish Potatoes on about 15 hectares every season.

He said that once the disease-resistant variety is ready, it could cut the huge [costs incurred on agro-chemicals](#) and paying workers who do the job.

“We have to use agro-chemicals eight times in two months,” he said.

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