

Long banned in Kenya, insect-resistant genetically-modified cotton brings farmers huge profits

Despite severe drought in much of the country for four years, cotton farmers in Lamu county have had a bounty harvest.

But this was not until 2020 when farmers who had previously abandoned cotton due to low yields and poor prices, started growing Bt cotton, a genetically modified variety.

The Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation says Bt cotton has been genetically improved to resist the African bollworm, which is the most destructive cotton pest.

In 2019, Bt cotton became the first biotech crop to be grown in Kenya after Cabinet approved commercial cultivation.

The Cabinet said the move was aimed at increasing textile and apparel manufacturing, and eventually reviving the cotton industry.

In March 2020, the government provided free Bt cotton seeds to farmers though there were reservations by some farmers.

But those determined to get into cotton farming now are laughing all the way to the bank.

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"With the high yields that we have seen, I believe going forward, more farmers will come on board and this will help increase production," [farmer Simon] Muguru says.

He urged the Government to support cotton farmers in getting cheap fertiliser and in increasing the prices.

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