

Rwanda faces a 'honey crisis': Here's how genetically-modified pest-resistant potatoes could help reduce pesticide use and boost bee populations

If adopted in Rwanda, genetically modified crops such as Irish potatoes that no longer require use of pesticides in treating potato late blight disease could stop the decline in bee population and help increase honey production, scientists have said.

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According to the International potato Centre (CIP), in East Africa, the disease can destroy as much as 60-100 per cent of the crop and it costs farmers an estimated \$3-10 billion per year globally.

In Rwanda, the disease erodes 80 per cent of expected produce if a farmer has no financial capacity to afford required agro-chemicals, according to farmers.

"Diseases and pests that attack crops triggered the use of pesticides which killed so many bees and thus reduced honey production from over 6,000 tonnes officially recorded, to 2,000 tonnes, per year," said Jean Damascene Ntaganda, the head of the beekeepers' federation in Rwanda.

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Targeting East African potato growing countries like Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, the International Potato Centre's scientists have bioengineered four locally grown potato varieties with three resistance (3R) genes. These bioengineered potatoes can be cultivated not only in East Africa (Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda) but also in other African countries, such as Ethiopia, and Nigeria.

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The alarming decline of bees and pollinators in many regions can be attributed to a number of factors including improper use of pesticides and habitat loss according to [the Food and Agriculture Organization, or] FAO.

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