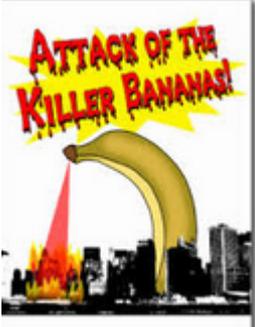


Attack of the killer bananas? Hardly.

By ACSH Staff — July 2, 2014



Dear anti-GM food aficionados,

We are warning you that it may be time to stock up on your Whole Foods vegan-burgers and kale because civilization has now taken one more step toward the extinction of all healthy foods on earth.

The latest culprit? The banana from hell.

In fact, this product is SO awful that it will provide deadly vitamin A to the many selfish Ugandans who would prefer not to die from a deficiency of the stuff. They have some nerve.

If this sounds similar to the invention of golden rice, which came *this* close to wiping out all of civilization, it is. The only difference is that in that case, it was the selfish Asians who also preferred not to die from the same deficiency, who were ultimately responsible for the need for the rice, which was genetically engineered just like the banana to provide beta-carotene, a vitamin A precursor.

The rationale behind each invention is the same. In many impoverished regions of the world, people are reliant on a single type of food. In Asia, this is rice. In Uganda, it is bananas.

The problem with this is that a diet that consists of one or two primary staples is likely to be deficient in one or more essential vitamins, minerals, or other nutrients. The consequences of this can be horrendous.

James Dale, director of the Centre for Tropical Crops and Biocommodities at Queensland University of Technology in Australia said, "We've relied on supplements for a long time to fight malnutrition, but history shows that there is always a resistant part of [the] population that supplements can't get to."

How bad is the problem? Dale continues, "Roughly 15 to 30 percent of the Ugandan population under 5 and women of childbearing age suffer from a deficiency. These are fairly typical statistics for developing countries." The population of Uganda is [37.5 million](#) ^[1]. Let's estimate that 25 percent of that number represents young children and women of childbearing age. This means

that between 1.5 and 3 million people in Uganda suffer from malnutrition in a country with the same population of California.

In fact, the stats for vitamin A deficiency in Asia are even more horrendous, with an estimated 500 million children thought to be deficient, leading to diseases of altered immunity being rampant, as well as blindness. Several millions have died as a result.

ASCH s Dr. Josh Bloom asks, I wonder if the anti-GM fools at Greenpeace know or care about this. My guess is that they certainly know, based solely on their fervent opposition to golden rice, which has impeded the planting and marketing of this life saving product.

In case you have any lingering doubts, their [website](#) [2] says, GE 'Golden' rice is environmentally irresponsible, poses risks to human health, and could compromise food, nutrition and financial security.

In 2005, Dr. Dale, with the backing of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, began investigating the feasibility of fortifying bananas with beta-carotene (aka provitamin A). He studied the East African Highland cooking banana, which makes up about 30 percent of the caloric intake of Ugandans.

He said, "With as few as 600,000 and as many as 2.5 million child deaths worldwide, and another 300,000 cases of blindness, annually attributed to a lack of the vitamin, finding ways to insert the vitamin into staple foods has become popular.

There is, however, a significant difference between the science of golden rice and super-bananas. Normal rice does not supply vitamin A or its precursor, beta-carotene. But, there are many varieties of wild bananas that are loaded with beta-carotene, although they are almost inedible.

So, Dale s group took the beta-carotene-producing gene from bananas in Papua New Guinea (they contain so much beta-carotene that they are orange) and transplanted the gene that produces it into the East African Highland cooking banana. The result a super-banana that contains ten-times the amount of beta-carotene found in a normal banana.

Dale describes the process: This gene we isolated and put in our super-bananas is a banana gene, and it always has been. We simply toned down its influence."

Possibly GM technology at its best. It s all good, right? Not really.

As usual, politics can do a splendid job of screwing everything up.

Dale explains, "Every election, there's a new government, and the bill goes back to the start. We feel we're caught in a loop. We need the biosafety and commercial sale bill to release the bananas, but we might need the bananas to be ready for release before the bill is passed."

In other words, the Ugandans run into the same nonsense that we encounter in the US. Except, in their case, many lives depend upon it.

For more on this story, see the [Scientific American](#) [3] article by Jennifer Huizen.

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Links

[1] <http://countryeconomy.com/demography/population/uganda>

[2] <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/campaigns/agriculture/problem/genetic-engineering/Greenpeace-and-Golden-Rice/>

[3] <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/super-bananas-enter-u-s-market-trials/>