

Uganda takes big step toward approving GMOs, an African breakthrough

By ACSH Staff — May 13, 2015



In April, we [brought](#) ^[1] you the story of Mark Lynas, a former anti-GMO activist

who converted to supporting the technology when he observed the power of GMOs to revolutionize the third world. One specific example for his conversion he cited was Uganda, where the bacterial wilt is devastating banana crops and two viruses are decimating starchy cassava crops. Both plants are staples of the Ugandan diet and economy, and both have GMO lines that are resistant to their respective diseases. Currently, it is illegal for farmers to use these modified crops, however new legislation is expected to change this.

Last week, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) parliamentary caucus, the ruling party in the Ugandan government, adopted the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill. This bill has provisions that allow farmers to start growing modified foods and will now be voted on in Parliament. However, with the ruling party's endorsement the bill is expected to pass expeditiously.

Speaking in favor of the bill, Hamson Obua, a member of Parliament from the NRM said: "*The most important thing is that Uganda must follow this global trend in terms of technological advancement ! Of recent our country has been faced with the challenges of drought, pests and diseases and our scientists have assured government that this is one of the remedies that can be put in place.*"

The bill's passage will allow for a whole host of economically and health conscious crops to be grown. One in particular that farmers and scientists in Uganda are looking forward to planting is the aptly named Super Banana which contains genes for resistance to the bacterial wilt as well as vitamin A. This enhanced banana could help the 15-30 percent of Ugandans under 5 who are vitamin A deficient. The banana is an excellent vehicle to fight vitamin A deficiency because Ugandans eat *a lot* of bananas. It is [reported](#) ^[2] that many Ugandans receive as much as 30% of their daily caloric intake from bananas, which equates to a person consuming as many as 11 bananas a day.

This measure also marks a huge step forward for Africa, which has been plagued by anti-GMO activism for years. With the bill's passage, Uganda will join a short list of GMO-friendly countries on the continent which include South Africa, Egypt, Sudan and Burkina Faso, although Sudan and

Burkina Faso only allow GM cotton.

ACSH's Nicholas Staropoli adds: Many African countries are in dire need of GMOs to preserve both their economies and food supplies as well as improve public health. Our hope is that other African countries will follow Uganda's lead and legalize GMOs. One particular country we hope for change in is Kenya, where maize is being devastated by the Maize Lethal Necrosis, a virus that has significantly cut crop yields for around 70% of Kenyan farmers. A GMO maize is available for use if the ban is lifted in Kenya

ACSH has several peer-reviewed publications on the science of [Ag-Biotech-GMOs](#) [3].

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[1] <http://acsh.org/2015/04/prominent-anti-gmo-activist-changed-his-mind-after-learning-the-science/>

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

[3] <http://acsh.org/2014/03/food-feeding-world-modern-agricultural-biotechnology/>