



INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty

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PRESS RELEASE

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Researchers, Policymakers Convene Conference to Discuss the Implications of GM Crops for Smallholder African Farmers

Entebbe—International experts, key policymakers, heads of farmers associations, and private sector representatives are gathering here from May 19-21 to examine the potential benefits and challenges of producing genetically modified (GM) crops in Africa. The conference, “Delivering Agricultural Biotechnology to African Farmers: Linking Economic Research to Decision Making,” is organized by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in collaboration with the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology and the Science Foundation for Livelihoods and Development.

“In the coming years, growing populations, stagnating agricultural productivity, and increasing climate change will make it even more difficult for Africa to tackle poverty, hunger, and malnutrition,” said Mark Rosegrant, director of IFPRI’s Environment and Production Technology Division. “To confront these challenges, many African countries are increasingly assessing a range of tools and technologies, including agricultural biotechnologies, which hold great promise for improving crop yields, household incomes, and the nutritional quality of food in an environmentally sustainable way.”

By bringing social scientists and decisionmakers together, this first-of-its-kind conference aims to bridge the gap between policy and research, and provide solid information and evidence

on which sound choices and investments related to GM technology can be made. Research presented at the conference, for example, shows that in delaying the approval of GM fungal-resistant banana, Uganda foregoes potential benefits ranging from about US\$179 million to US\$365 million a year. According to IFPRI analysis, expansion in the adoption of GM crops could also significantly lower the price of food in developing countries by 2050. Realizing these benefits, however, depends on acceptance by farmers, public awareness and consumer preferences, regulatory and market issues, and strong political will, including the willingness to invest in new technology.

Deciding whether or not to make GM crops a priority in their agricultural development and food and nutrition security strategies and invest in modern biotechnology is an important consideration for many African countries. To help inform such policy decisions, conference participants will share research findings that address critical questions, including:

- What are the potential economic gains and drawbacks of GM crops, especially for poor, rural households?
- What obstacles prevent smallholder farmers from gaining access to and successfully using GM technology, and how can these constraints be overcome?
- What lessons can be learned from other developing countries, such as South Africa, China, and India, where GM crops are already being commercially grown by smallholder farmers?
- How can policymaking be improved to ease the dissemination and commercialization of agricultural biotechnologies?
- What are the regional and international trade implications of growing GM crops in Africa?

“Managing the opportunities and risks posed by GM crops, including trade-related challenges, requires countries to have well-functioning, efficient, and responsible biosafety systems,” said Margaret Karembu, director of the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) AfriCenter in Nairobi, where the Kenya Biosafety Bill became law in February 2009, joining Mali and Togo, which enacted national biosafety

legislation in 2008. “These countries’ experiences offer useful lessons for other African countries working to develop biosafety policies, including the increased potential to benefit from proven research and help smallholder farmers with limited resources gain access to agricultural biotechnologies and successfully use them,” she added.

To draw additional lessons, conference participants will examine a number of case studies, including:

- The challenges of bringing insect-resistant (Bt) cowpea to market in Nigeria
- Consumer perceptions of the potential introduction of a fungal-resistant banana in Uganda
- Impact of GM crops for smallholder farmers in the Philippines, Honduras, Colombia, and Bolivia

“Considerable experience suggests that biotechnology can contribute to improved food production and quality in developing countries,” concluded Dr. Rosegrant. “Moreover, crop traits currently in the development pipeline—including drought and heat tolerance—are of particular value to African farmers. Through continued research, IFPRI hopes to provide more information about genetically modified crops and their potential to benefit smallholder farmers and improve the lives of other poor people throughout Africa.”

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