

Think about farmers and do not frustrate scientists

EDITOR: As a farmer and their leader, I know how difficult it is to be a farmer in Uganda.

Here in Nakasongola, the problem of drought, pests and diseases remain rampant. Currently, the temperatures are unusually high and the area is all dry. We resort to praying and hoping the heavens would listen to us and release rain to water our crops.

The challenges farmers face are many and we cannot continue to rely on fate if we are to survive in these harsh conditions. Other than drought, we still have the problem of cassava brown streak disease. This disease is so devastating and elusive. It is very difficult to detect on the leaves and so farmers continue taking care of the garden only to find later that what they were taking care of are rotten and useless tubers.

We appreciate NARO for the tolerant varieties they have released to try to control this disease but the varieties eventually succumb. Besides succumbing, farmers are not used to the new varieties.

We are told by NARO scientists that the new

biotechnology method they are currently using will protect our local varieties from the disease without messing up with the taste. I believed them because the crop I saw that was improved looks just as what our farmers have been growing. I was told the only difference would be its ability to resist the disease.

We do not know what is happening with these crops at NARO. When shall we have them? What we were told of and continue to hear is that these crops are unique and need to be regulated by Government. Why is the Government then delaying with the regulations? Why is Government frustrating the work of scientists? My plea to those who are in charge of making laws is for them to think about farmers who cannot have food because their cassava is rotten and yet cassava is a crop that help us go through the period of drought.

With this climate change, farmers are becoming more vulnerable because of crop failures. If there is any means that can help us manage or reduce on the effect of drought, pests and disease, it should be

developed very fast.

Can the Government through Operation Wealth Creation give us some of the genetically modified cassava that is at Namulonge so we can try on our farms? For us farmers, we want the crops that will help us and we do not see any valid reason why NARO should keep on saying they cannot give us the crops because there is no law. Should we first lose our crops to drought and disease and our lives too for Government to respond?

We request scientists to consider rolling out varieties that do not need spraying, if they care about our health. If there are GMOs that we do not have to spray, please release them for us with or without the law.

Policy makers should always consult with farmers and find out what farmers go through to ensure food is produced.

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