

Namulonge to introduce herbicide-resistant seeds

By Agnes Nantambi

Researchers from the National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRI) Namulonge have embarked on a project to introduce herbicide-resistant seed varieties to address weeding challenges.

Currently, weeding is one of the biggest challenges farmers face, taking a lot of money, especially during the rainy season.

Habiba Naluyima, a farmer in Bugerere, claims that weeding

takes the biggest percentage of agricultural investment since without it, farmers cannot realise reasonable harvests.

Officials from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovations, recently visited NaCCRI at Namulonge Agricultural Research Institute to identify marketable research innovations which can benefit farmers.

Speaking during the visit, Dr Barbara Mugwanya Zawedde, the co-ordinator at the Uganda Biosciences Information Centre (UBIC), said weeding

of crops does not only affect the poor farmers, but also the rich as it takes the biggest percentage of agricultural investment.

She revealed that they have embarked on a campaign to introduce herbicide-resistant seed varieties in a few years to address weeding challenges faced by farmers.

"Weeding is difficult as it is costly for the farmers. Even when you pay a lot to one person to weed, the work done is re-done immediately because of the quick

germination rate of weeds," she said.

Many developed countries have herbicide-resistant seed varieties developed through genetic engineering technology.

In Uganda, NARO is developing several GMO crop varieties and is awaiting the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill 2012 to be enacted into law, before they are released to farmers.

Dr Godfrey Asea, the director of NaCCRI, said Uganda does not have herbicide technology

yet, but they are planning one for maize to manage weeds.

He revealed that although there are some herbicides which are effective for maize, in some countries such as the US, Argentina, Brazil and South Africa, the herbicide-tolerant gene is incorporated into the genetically modified organisms (GMO plants) so that it can be sprayed easily.

He said such varieties are essential for commercial farmers who cannot weed large acreages of land.

He said Uganda needs

a technology of having herbicide-tolerant crops where one just plants the crop and then spray without killing the crop, especially if it is maize or cotton.

The permanent secretary at the Ministry of Science, David Obong, said the visit was part of the programme to reach out to science stakeholders to engage and get to know what is happening in their sectors.

He observed that agricultural research is important for the country because of its centrality in food security.