

Thoughts on the bio-technology law

Last week, the Parliament of Uganda passed the Biotechnology and Bio-safety Bill into law.

This should be welcome news for farmers and all those interested in the economic growth of the country.

Uganda joins African countries such as Sudan, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and South Africa that are already enjoying the benefits of growing biotech crops.

Biotechnology has transformed agriculture in countries such as China, India, Argentina, Brazil, and elsewhere in the world.

Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, are about to set up similar biotechnology regulatory laws in their respective countries to enhance agricultural production.

As has often been mentioned in this column, agriculture in Uganda is constrained by devastating challenges such as pests and diseases that have destroyed crops and for which there is no chemical solution.

There has been a decline in the production of such food crops as banana, cassava, and maize despite a fast growing population that must be fed.

We have such issues as prolonged droughts, land fragmentation, and malnutrition.

Uganda has some of the leading agricultural research scientists in Africa and in the past few years they have developed pest resistant crops, herbicide tolerant crops, and drought tolerant crops.

Naro has also produced bio-fortified banana with increased provitamin A to reduce malnutrition.

Passing of the bill into law means that our farmers will now grow banana breeds that are not only more nutritive but are also resistant to the much dreaded banana bacterial wilt (BBW).

Farmers will also gain access to cassava varieties that are resistant to the cassava brown streak disease (CBSD).

Farmers in Kigezi and elsewhere will grow potatoes without much need for pesticides. Maize farmers will plant drought tolerant maize and there is hope that through biotechnology the fall armyworm which wiped out several maize fields last season will not be the big threat it is today. Smaller plots resulting from population pressure and land fragmentation will become productive by planting improved and high yielding crop breeds obtained through biotechnology.

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