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Scientists welcome passing of GMO Bill

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KAMPALA. Scientists have welcomed the newly-enacted National Biosafety Act, saying farmers will be the most beneficiaries.

Passed by Parliament last week, the formerly National Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill 2012 that was renamed and passed had, for many years turned controversial with opponents of the Bill claiming genetically modified crops cannot be replanted.

Dr Godfrey Asea, the director National Crops Resources Research Institute (NaCRRRI) Namulonge, a government research body, said the Act, waiting to be assented to by the President, will address drought, pests and diseases and low yields of crops.

"The law will give us a framework to move our work from laboratories and confinements to environment release to farmers," Mr Asea said yesterday by telephone.

"The law will also help Uganda regulate goods that come from abroad," he added.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Dr Elioda Tumwesigye, said last week that the Act will facilitate safe development and application of modern biotechnology.

"We have put in place provisions as per best practices globally that ensures that modern biotechnology is used in a matter that is safe to humans, animals, biodiversity and the environment," Dr Tumwesigye said.

"It will alleviate our farmers from the devastation and impoverishment often caused by crop diseases, animal diseases and unpredictable weather and drought," he added.

Mr David Obong, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, said the ministry will ensure the legislation is translated into the key local languages for communities to understand and ensure that the population is sensitised about the law.

ABOUT THE ACT

The Act establishes institutions that shall regulate and promote the safe development, the Act designates the Ministry of Science and Technology as the competent authority on matters related to biosafety. It also establishes an inter-ministerial policy committee on biotechnology and biosafety chaired by the Prime Minister and consisting of ministers from Science, Health, among others.