

NUTRITION NEWS

Adding Nutrients To A Worldwide Food Staple

(NAPSA)—A new program is helping to address malnutrition by improving the nutritional content of one of the world's major crops.

Micronutrient deficiencies, especially those of vitamin A, iron and zinc, remain a large problem for several populations, particularly women of childbearing age and young children. Vitamin A deficiency is one of the most preventable causes of blindness.

The program, Harvest Plus, was launched by the World Bank Consultative Group for International Agriculture Research Centers, International Food Policy Research Institute and International Center for Tropical Agricultural Research. With critical information from Monsanto Company, the program is currently working on ways to nutritionally improve an African variety of maize with increased levels of provitamin A.

Provitamin A, or beta-carotene, is derived from plant sources and converted into vitamin A by the body. Maize is the primary crop in many African countries where vitamin A deficiency is prevalent.

"Agricultural biotechnology has the potential to help address malnutrition in Africa and other developing countries when used with traditional plant breeding to produce staple crops with higher



Biotechnology that nutritionally enhances crops may help prevent blindness.

levels of important nutrients," said Hugh Grant, Monsanto president and CEO. "We are hoping that the technology Monsanto is sharing will help researchers successfully develop an enhanced provitamin A maize, which would provide another tool to help alleviate vitamin A deficiency."

Given the highly complex nature of this project, it is expected to take five or more years to achieve success. But it is possible that advanced breeding work will begin in 2004 and a field test may take place in late 2004.

HarvestPlus is also investigating approaches to nutritionally enhancing sweet potato, cassava and common beans, including conventional breeding and plant biotechnology.

In addition to provitamin A enhancement, researchers are also examining ways to boost the iron and zinc content of these crops.

The program will train scientists from Africa on plant science, biotechnology and nutrition, thereby building local expertise in these areas.

Monsanto is one of several institutions from Africa, Europe and the United States involved in the maize project, which is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. Monsanto's sharing its technology reflects its commitment to sharing knowledge with public institutions so that it can benefit people and the environment, particularly in the developing world.

Some of the notable sharing projects the company has participated in include: providing broad access to a working draft of the rice genome and participating in work to develop the virus-resistant sweet potatoes in Africa and papayas in South East Asia. In addition, the company supports the St. Louis-based Donald Danforth Plant Science Center's efforts to develop a virus-resistant cassava, also a staple crop in Africa.

Monsanto Company is a leading global provider of technology-based solutions and agricultural products that improve farm productivity and food quality. For more information on Monsanto, see www.monsanto.com.