



MEDIA RELEASE

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Finally, GM potatoes

The press regularly report on new agricultural technology aimed at either commercial farmers or smallholder farmers in rural areas of South Africa.

The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) has developed new potato varieties with food production, storage and environmental benefits that can be added to their potato breeding programme and made available to both smallholder and commercial farmers once they are approved. The research partnership is financially supported by USAID.

The ARC will apply to national authorities for a safety assessment and general release approval of their SpuntaG2 potato, which is resistant against potato tuber moth damage in the field and in storage. This approval will enable the ARC to initiate farmer participatory trials under unconfined conditions and develop a certification and labelling system to prepare for commercial release of improved potato varieties

This is the first publicly funded genetically modified (GM) crop to enter the safety approval process for general use in South Africa. Approved cotton, maize and soybean events are produced by seed companies.

The SpuntaG2 potato provides farmers with an alternative to chemical pesticide use for the control of potato tuber moth. This can reduce costs and be healthier for people and the environment.

Potato tuber moths lay eggs on the plant surface and their larvae burrow into the potatoes causing considerable damage. Potatoes saved by farmers for food or planting, are particularly affected. They can lose some of their crop in the field and all of their stored potatoes as a result of the moths.

SpuntaG2 has shown complete protection against tuber moth during six years of testing in six major potato growing areas of South Africa. These studies were carried out with permission from national regulators and included measures to control pollen and potatoes at the trial sites. Environmental studies showed that SpuntaG2 controls the potato tuber moth without affecting other organisms.

Studies show that the potatoes are as safe to grow and eat as other potatoes. When this has been reconfirmed and approved by South African authorities under the GMO Act, the ARC will enable smallholder farmers to test the potatoes in their fields.

If the regulators and smallholder farmers are satisfied with SpuntaG2, the ARC will transfer potato tuber moth resistance to other preferred varieties.

The ARC will add SpuntaG2 to its breeding programme, but does not plan to release SpuntaG2 for commercial farming unless these farmers specifically request the material. Other commercial varieties will take three to four years to develop.

Contact details

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