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The Truth

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A Lenten Appeal for Biotechnology

MAR 10, 2011

By [Gilbert Arap Bor - Kapseret, Kenya \(www.truthabouttrade.org\)](#)

The season of Lent is upon us--the time of year when Christians around the world prepare for Easter through prayer, charity, and self-denial. Many farmers in the northern hemisphere also will use this season to start planting crops. It also happens that farmers in the 'bread basket of Kenya', where I live and farm, will also be planting the country's staple maize crop during the same period. Appropriately, the word "Lent" comes from an Anglo-Saxon term for spring.

As a practicing Catholic who farms in Kenya, I'm committed to growing as much food as possible. I see it as an economic necessity for my family as well as a moral obligation that I must uphold as a steward of the earth.

That's why I'd like to enjoy access to genetically modified seeds--a benefit that I don't have right now, even though farmers in many other countries do.

A couple of years ago, a branch of the Vatican called the Pontifical Academy of Sciences gave its blessing to GM crops. At a conference in Rome, it celebrated GM food for its "great potential to improve the lives of the poor."

This is certainly my impression, based on my conversations with farmers who use biotechnology. All of them say it has improved their lot. They talk about how GM crops have allowed them to kiss perpetual hunger goodbye. They can afford to educate their children and purchase small luxuries that seemed out of reach just a few years ago.

Biotechnology is a tool of empowerment for farmers everywhere--and especially in the developing world.

So I was distressed to read the recent comments of a highly placed African Clergyman at the Vatican: "I ask myself, why force an African farmer to buy seeds produced in other lands and with other means? The doubt arises that behind this is the play of maintaining economic dependence at all cost." He went on to add, provocatively for a son of Africa: "I'd even say it becomes like a new form of slavery."

He is entitled to his opinion and I respect that. I respect all announcements by the leaders of my church.

Yet, I have my own opinion, drawn from my experience as one of the small-scale African farmers who produce as much as 80 percent of the food consumed on our continent.

We need access to GM seeds so that we can reduce hunger and famine on our impoverished continent and reduce its dependence on foreign food donations. I would certainly like to see the development of GM seeds on African soil by African researchers, an effort that the [Kenya Agricultural Research Institute](#) has tried to spearhead. The success of this project would remove much of the fear that African farmers will be forced to rely on foreign companies for their livelihood.

The benefits of GM crops are considerable. They would allow me to use less pesticide. This not only reduces a potential health risk for me and my family, but it also lowers my business costs--a saving that I can pass on to consumers at a time of skyrocketing food prices. Moreover, these crops would improve my ability to survive drought. They would lessen the amount of greenhouse gases I produce as I farm.

If we truly care about environmental sustainability, then we have to grow more food on existing farmland. GM crops are an important ally.

As Pope Benedict XVI has written: "Nature is a book whose history, whose evolution, whose writing and meaning we read according to different approaches of the sciences, while all the time, presupposing the foundational presence of the author has wished to reveal himself therein."

There is one thing we must never do: Allow the urgent need for agricultural innovation to suffer at the hands of political agendas. The development of GM seeds is much like scientific progress in other areas, such as the effort to defeat the scourge of HIV/AIDS. It's a moral mission well suited to the beliefs of Catholics.

In the book of Genesis (1:29), God says: "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food."

We must make the most of this miraculous gift--and that means letting the science of biotechnology help us grow more food for a hungry world.

Gilbert Arap Bor grows maize, vegetables and dairy cows on a small-scale farm of 25 acres in Kapseret, near Eldoret, Kenya. Mr. Bor is a member of the Truth About Trade & Technology [Global Farmer Network](http://www.truthabouttrade.org). www.truthabouttrade.org

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Please do not fall pray to Monsanto and others that make the claim that GMO is the answer to feeding the world and keeping it healthy.

Research will tell you that these claims are false and GMO has not increased yields and as in the case of Starlink was pulled because of increased health problems when it was introduced in the food supply.

You refer to the Bible and Genesis(1:29) - God did not intend for his perfect creations to be changed by man to suit himself or his pocketbook.

If you do not want to suffer at the hands of political agends then do not be let like a sheep to slaughter.

What does Monsanto or any other chemical company care what happens to the people of your country - they only care how much money they can make.

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