

Super plants may fight African hunger

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Ohio scientists say they've produced genetically modified cassava plants with roots more than two-and-a-half times the size of normal cassava roots.

The Ohio State University researchers say the project might help ease hunger in many nations where people rely heavily on the cassava plant as a primary food source.

The study -- led by Richard Sayre, a cellular and molecular biology professor -- involved using a gene from the bacterium *E. coli* to genetically modify cassava plants. The plants, grown in a greenhouse, produced roots that were an average 2.6 times larger than those produced by regular cassava plants.

"Not only did these plants produce larger roots, but the whole plant was bigger and had more leaves," Sayre said. Both the roots and leaves of the cassava plant are edible.

Cassava is the primary food source for more than 250 million Africans -- about 40 percent of the continent's population, Sayre said. And the plant's starchy tuberous root is a substantial portion of the diet of nearly 600 million people worldwide.

The study appears in the online early issue of the *Plant Biotechnology Journal*.

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