

Uganda pesticide risk rises after AGOA expulsion

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Uganda farm, 2019. Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Ugandans are at increased risk of diabetes and cancer in the wake of the country's expulsion from a trade pact with the U.S., nutritionists say.

Spurred by a Ugandan law that imposes a death sentence for some homosexual acts, U.S. president Joe Biden expelled the country from the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade pact in a decree issued on 29 December last year.

Under Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act, sex between two people of the same gender is punishable by life imprisonment, while "aggravated homosexuality" is punishable by death.

The expulsion effectively closes the U.S. market for Ugandan organic crops such as coffee, cocoa and spices like vanilla, worth in total over US\$8 million in 2023, according to data from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Pesticides

It means many of Uganda's organic farmers are turning to pesticides to boost yields and profits.

"The long-term consumption of non-[organic foods](#) can cause endocrine problems and neurotoxicity," explained Daniel Kamara, a clinical nutritionist at Uganda's Mulago National Referral Hospital.

"Also consider that the long-term use of pesticides can increase the number of antibiotic-resistant bacteria."

He explains that pesticides in non-organic foods can lead to increased risk to certain cancer types such as leukemia, prostate, lung, breast and skin, along with diabetes.

Organic foods can contain higher levels of antioxidants, especially polyphenols, while they often have lower levels of toxic metals such as cadmium, he added.

Chariton Namuwoza, the executive director of organic industry organization the National Organic Agricultural Movement of Uganda (NOGAMU), says AGOA represented 90% of the global demand for the country's organic produce.

"We will have a shock," he said, adding that the U.S. market represented a major growth avenue for the sector.

"Ugandan farmers will have to survive in all ways, hence turning to foods that take less time—regardless of [their] health threat."

Pamela Bakabulindi a sweet pepper greenhouse urban farmer in Mukono district, just outside the capital Kampala, says following the country's expulsion from AGOA she was "opting to go for non-organic food production because their yields are way higher than organic food farming.

"Ugandans do not appreciate these products," she added.

Uganda's Minister of State for Industry, David Bahati, defended the government's decision, saying Uganda wouldn't sacrifice its culture and values.

In March this year, Uganda will mark one year since the signing of the anti-homosexuality law which includes a [death penalty](#) and has had a significant social, economic and political impact on the nation.

Provided by SciDev.Net

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