Kenya backs farming of Monsanto-created GM crop

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Kenya has approved the cultivation a GM variety strand created by Monsanto, the president's office said, the first time such crops have been allowed in the dynamic East African economy.

The decision by Kenya's cabinet, announced late Thursday, followed the "successful completion" of five years of field trials, the presidency said.

The cabinet approved the planting of BT cotton, a pest-resistant strain engineered by Monsanto, a seeds and pesticides powerhouse acquired by chemical giant Bayer in 2018.

"The commercial farming of BT cotton is set to ensure farmers earn more from the crop through increased production," a statement from President Uhuru Kenyatta's office said.

Kenyatta has been seeking to spur economic growth through manufacturing, universal healthcare, access to affordable housing and improving food security—known as his "big four" agenda.

Giving the green light to GM cotton will contribute to manufacturing as "Kenya seeks to establish itself as a regional leader in textile and apparel production".

GM crops have been banned in Kenya since 2012.

However, when asked by AFP, a spokeswoman for the president neither confirmed nor denied that this approval represented a reversal of that stance.

An environmental impact assessment needed before this cotton can be cultivated has not yet been conducted, an official at the government's agriculture research agency said.

The National Environmental Management Authority is expected to conduct its study in early 2020.

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