

Intellectual Property: Naro recognises 30 scientists for seed development



One of the beneficiaries of the NARO-managed Intellectual Property (IP) rights for agricultural innovations, Ms Jane Alupo, a research technician. PHOTO/LOMINDA AFEDRARU

The essence of rewarding the scientists is to ensure continued crop variety development for farmer use as well as to enable the agro-industrialisation sector to grow.

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Crop scientists at the National Agricultural Research organisation (Naro) are reaping from the fruits of research, with selected scientists rewarded for seed developed for farmer use.

This was done through protection of their Intellectual Property (IP) rights, where seed companies that acquire breeder seed from Naro pay an agreed rate for each seed variety acquired.

This exercise has been ongoing for the last three years with the 2025 award ceremony officiated at the National Agricultural Crops Resources Research Institute. About 30 scientists breeding various crop varieties were given awards totalling to over Shs200 million.

Background

NARO manages Intellectual Property (IP) rights for agricultural innovations such as improved crop varieties and technologies, protecting them through patents, licenses and royalties to benefit researchers and the nation.

Experts define IP as 'exclusive rights on intellectual creation which include patents for scientific works and inventions, trademarks and design for business, copyrights for artistic and musical works, plant variety protection for new crop and tree varieties among others.

Naro's IP strategy focuses on identifying, protecting and commercialising research, generating revenue such as royalties for scientists and enhancing tech-

nology transfer to farmers, ensuring Naro's discoveries drive agricultural development, food security and economic growth in Uganda, aligning with national IP.

Amongst the different types of IP, Naro has zeroed on plant variety protection where scientists who innovate, their plant varieties are protected by ensuring those wishing to use them to pay a royalty fee.

These crops include, maize, rice, beans, sorghum, finger millet, sunflower and groundnuts among others.

Importance of rewarding scientists

Naro director general Dr Yonna Baguma noted that the main aim of the recognition is for scientists to continue innovating for food nutrition, food and environmental security.

"Work at Naro", he said, "is done hand in hand with the private sector meaning the seed developed by the scientists is taken up by seed companies for massive multiplication for farmers use."

"As such, Naro has licensed over 100 crop varieties of crops such as Maize, bean, and rice but the institution is advancing beyond licensing vegetative propagated crops."

Last year, seed companies contributed over half a billion shillings as fee towards variety protection rights, Dr Baguma said.

In 2023, Naro collected Shs200.2 million and in 2024 the figure increased to Shs414.2 million.

This money is incorporated in the consolidated fund and part of it is given

TASKS

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back to breeders.

Dr Sadik Kassim, the deputy director general Agricultural Technology Promotion noted that the recognition of scientists will motivate them to develop crop varieties which industries and farmers need.

"Scientists will be in position to give information to seed companies on which seed varieties is preferred by farmers. All these will lead to efforts towards improving the agro industrialisation sector in this country," he said.

The IP process and the awards

The outgoing chairperson of the Naro Intellectual Property Committee Dr. Sylvester Dickson Baguma explained that the committee is tasked with collecting IP money from the 32 seed companies dealing in seed processing. These include Farm Inputs Care Centre Ltd (FICA Seeds), Syova Seed (U) Limited, Victoria Seeds, NASECO, Bioseed, Capstone, Darusalam and Amazon Seed among others.

"When the seed companies multiply and sell the seed, they pay to Naro a specific fee per each kg of seed sold," Dr Dickson Baguma, also the Executive Director of the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) said.

Plant variety protection

According to the Director of NaCRRRI, Dr Titus Alicai, seed varieties must be distinct, should not have been commercialised or disposed of, uniform in characteristics and stable for farmer use.

"Therefore in order for a scientist to develop a variety to be considered for IP, they are required to work closely with the Naro IP office when conducting research and must be aware of the option that will best leverage the commercial potential of their research work," he said.