

Disease-resistant GMO citrus trees approved for trialling

The Environmental Protection Agency announced that it has given major Florida citrus grower, Southern Gardens, approval for large-scale field testing of citrus trees that have been genetically engineered to resist citrus greening, a ruinous disease that has caused orange production to plummet to the lowest levels seen in decades.

Southern Gardens has been developing the trees for years now. Their genome has been modified to include a gene from spinach plants that produces a protein that makes citrus trees inhospitable to the bacteria that cause citrus greening. Though scientists and citrus growers are exploring several possible treatments for greening, many believe that the genetically modified tree offers the best chances of success.

If this testing process goes well, and Southern Gardens wants to plant a commercial crop, the company will be required to get approval from the EPA and the USDA. In addition, the Food and Drug Administration has an optional approval process for GMO foods.

Southern Gardens president, Ricke Kress said, in short, that the very soonest these oranges could come to market would be in three years, but that five to seven years would be a more realistic target.

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