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Australia approves planting of GM Banana for commercial supply chain

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Australia's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) has issued license DIR 199 to Queensland University of Technology (QUT), to commercially cultivate QCAV-4, a genetically modified (GM) variety of Cavendish banana resistant to the fungal disease Fusarium wilt tropical race 4 (TR4), also known as Panama disease.

On February 16, 2024, the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) also notified the Food Ministers' Meeting (FMM) that it has approved QCAV-4 as suitable for human consumption. FSANZ approved this GM banana for sale as a food in Australia and New Zealand. The GM bananas and any derived food products are subject to mandatory GM labeling.

The QCAV-4 banana is the world's first GM banana to be approved for commercial production and also the first Australian GM fruit approved for growing in Australia. QCAV-4 offers a potential safety net against the devastating Panama Disease tropical race 4 (TR4) which threatens the global $20 billion banana industry.

Panama Disease TR4 has already crippled Cavendish banana production in Asia, has started to take a foothold in South America, and occurs in Australia in the Northern Territory and North Queensland. QCAV-4 is a Cavendish Grand Nain banana that has been bioengineered with a single banana resistance gene, RGA2, from the wild, south-east Asian banana,*Musa acuminata* ssp *malaccensis*.

The GM banana plants may be grown in all banana growing areas in Australia, subject to restrictions in some Australian States and Territories for marketing reasons. The Regulator has not imposed any specific measures to manage risk, as the

risk assessment concluded that this release of GM banana plants poses negligible risk to the health and safety of people or the environment.