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Absolute enters Africa with INERA, positioning biologicals for new agricultural growth market

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In an exclusive interview, Agam Khare, Founder and Group CEO, Absolute, discusses the companyâ??s entry into Kenya, the commercial case for affordable biologicals, AI-led discovery, and its ambition to build a wider African growth platform by 2027



Africaâ??s agricultural productivity challenge is not simply a question of access to better inputs; it is about making innovation commercially viable for farmers confronting fragile soils, water stress, rising compliance demands and constrained purchasing power. Absoluteâ??s entry into Kenya through its INERA biologicals portfolio signals a strategic bet that biological solutions can move beyond the premium-input category and become integral to mainstream farm economics. In this exclusive interview, **Agam Khare, Founder and Group CEO, Absolute**, explains how the company intends to translate its Indian field experience into African markets while adapting products and distribution to local agronomic realities. He also outlines how Absoluteâ??s AI-native Nature Intelligence Platform and Nature+ discovery engine are designed to change the economics of biological innovation by narrowing the gap between discovery and field validation. The conversation examines the growing commercial relevance of residue-compliant crop solutions, nutrient-use efficiency and climate resilience, while questioning what it will take to establish farmer trust at scale. As Absolute looks towards 2027 and evaluates further expansion across East and West Africa, the decisive measure will not be the size of its technology portfolio, but demonstrable improvements in farm productivity, input efficiency and farmer income.

INERA's entry into Kenya marks Absolute's first commercial step into Africa. What does Kenya offer that makes it the right launchpad for taking your biologicals platform into one of the world's most important emerging agricultural markets?

Kenya sits at a unique intersection with a large, export-oriented horticulture and floriculture industry, and one of the continent's most structurally important agricultural economies. Agriculture contributes close to a quarter of Kenya's GDP, and roughly 72 per cent of the population depends on it directly or indirectly, tying the sector's productivity directly to food security. Kenyan

growers are also under immediate pressure: the EU is tightening Maximum Residue Level requirements on export commodities, while Kenya's own regulator is reviewing and withdrawing a number of conventional agricultural input products, narrowing what growers can still rely on. They need inputs that keep performing reliably as old options are phased out and new compliance thresholds take hold. INERA's products are built around exactly that kind of consistency. We've partnered with an established Kenyan agricultural company experienced across floriculture, exotic herbs and horticulture, whose local market knowledge and distribution network let us move from launch to real farm-level impact quickly.

Africa faces a stark productivity gap, but farmers also operate under severe constraints around input affordability, water availability and soil health. Can biologicals deliver productivity gains at a cost that works for smallholder farmers, rather than becoming another premium input for commercial agriculture?

Yes, and that's the premise these products were built on. Biologicals usually become a premium add-on when they're priced only around the margins of commercial growers who can absorb the upfront cost. Ours are built differently, around nutrient use efficiency (NUE): how much of an applied nutrient a crop actually takes up and uses. More of what a farmer already applies gets absorbed, roots pull more water and nutrients from soil that's already there, and plants hold up better through a dry spell instead of losing the season. That's what makes the economics work at smallholder scale: the farmer isn't paying extra for the input, they're getting more out of what they already spend, which for many smallholder households is as much a food-security question as a yield one. In India, our Phyro and Baco lines have reached well over two million farmers, a meaningful share of them smallholders on small plots, real-world proof the model holds at that scale. Kenya isn't India though: farm sizes, crop economics and distribution costs differ. That's why the pricing and partner model we're building in Kenya is grounded in how our local distributor already works with these growers, shaped specifically around their purchasing patterns and crop economics.

INERA is launching six products spanning biological nutrition management, plant physiology and climate resilience. What evidence from your Indian field experience gives you confidence that these products will perform consistently across Kenya's very different crops, soils and climatic conditions?

The confidence comes from scale, breadth, and years of R&D and on-the-ground experience. INERA has run more than 50,000 field trials and farmer demonstrations in India, across over 100 acres and more than ten agro-climatic zones against a wide range of soils, rainfall patterns and crops. It isn't just trial-stage evidence either: Phyro, Baco and Leiro are already commercial product lines in India, sold through our distribution network and used by farmers season after season. Across both the controlled trials and real-world commercial use, we've consistently seen higher yields, strong tolerance to abiotic stress, and more consistent root development and germination, the outcomes these products are designed around. Farmer testimonials back this up. That breadth is what lets us predict with real confidence how a product like a mycorrhizal biofertiliser or a stress-response biostimulant will perform in a new environment. We didn't stop at the Indian data. Alongside the Indian work, we've been running our own dedicated field-trial programme in Kenya for a while now, more than three growing seasons, and it's those Kenya-specific results that gave us the confidence to commercialise. Our Kenyan partner and INERA's international team regularly work with local growers for their adoption and scaling opportunities. Field trust in a new geography has to be earned locally, trial by trial.

Your proposition goes beyond replacing conventional inputs to improving nutrient mobilisation, root function and plant resilience. How should farmers and agribusinesses measure the economic value of these biological interventions, through higher yields, lower input use, improved quality, greater resilience or a combination of these outcomes?

The longer conventional inputs are used, the more they tend to degrade soil health, and that decline is why nutrient mobilisation slows down in the first place. INERA's biological portfolio is derived from nature: these products improve soil health first, which is what makes nutrients available for root function and resilience. A single number doesn't capture the economic value of that well, because it shows up differently depending on the grower. For a staple-crop smallholder, the economic case often shows up mostly as input efficiency: getting more out of the fertiliser they already apply, or needing less of it over time. For a Kenyan floriculture or horticulture exporter, quality and compliance usually dominate instead. A biostimulant that helps a flower hold its colour and shelf life, or keeps residue levels inside EU Maximum Residue Level thresholds, can decide whether a consignment is accepted or rejected outright, often outweighing a marginal yield gain. For growers in increasingly unpredictable climates, resilience is its own form of economic value too: getting a crop through a heat wave or dry spell instead of losing the season, even when it doesn't show up as a yield increase in an average year. The honest answer is that INERA's products help farmers cope with climate change and produce crops more sustainably and profitably.

Absolute describes itself as an AI-native biosolutions company, combining its Nature Intelligence Platform with Nature+ for biological discovery and design. What does AI fundamentally change in the economics and speed of

discovering agricultural biologicals compared with conventional R&D approaches?

Conventional biological discovery is inherently slow and capital-intensive, because it runs on brute-force search: screen thousands of microbial strains or molecules against a problem, accept that most will fail, and spend years in trial and error before a handful earn a real shot at validation. Most of that cost and time goes into finding out what doesn't work, often in the field, where failure is most expensive. That's the baseline AI is changing. Our platform changes both sides of that, and NIP and Nature+ do different jobs in making it happen. NIP, our Nature Intelligence Platform, is the data foundation: a proprietary repository of thousands of microbes, biomolecules and enzymes characterised from diverse natural ecosystems, including extreme environments like glaciers, volcanic sites, mangroves and deserts. Nature+, our AI-based design and discovery layer, is what changes the economics, turning that data into speed and lower cost. Instead of screening candidates one by one, it interrogates NIP's biological data to predict function and interactions computationally, and helps us design and prioritise candidates against a defined agricultural problem before a single one reaches a greenhouse or field trial. That shifts where failure happens: a weak candidate gets filtered out in a computational screen instead of surviving all the way to an expensive, multi-season field trial, which is where conventional R&D loses most of its time and money. Experimental validation still happens, but that's exactly what AI changes: instead of years spent finding out what fails, we spend that time validating what's already likely to work.

Kenya is undergoing a broader transition in crop-protection regulation, while growers serving export markets face increasing demands around residues, quality and sustainability. How do you see this regulatory and market shift changing the competitive landscape for biological crop-protection technologies in Africa?

We think this is a genuine inflection point, not just a compliance headache for growers. A regulator is reviewing and withdrawing a meaningful number of conventional crop-protection products, and at the same time, Kenya's largest export market is tightening Maximum Residue Level thresholds. Together, this creates a real gap between what growers are used to relying on and what they're now allowed or able to use, and that gap has to be filled by sustainable inputs. It creates space for biological crop-protection technologies, but we'd caution against assuming the space fills itself. The companies that earn a durable position will be the ones that can show real field performance and a credible regulatory and commercialisation pathway. That's exactly why we're building our biological crop-protection pipeline, RNAi-based biocontrols, peptide-based inputs and AI-discovered bioherbicides, as a deliberate, validated follow-on to our initial nutrition and resilience portfolio in Kenya. Over the next few years, we expect the African market to differentiate sharply between biological solutions that are genuinely field-proven, residue-compliant and part of a real shift toward regenerative agriculture.

INERA has conducted more than 50,000 field trials and farmer demonstrations across 10-plus agro-climatic zones in India. As you enter Africa, how will you balance a globally scalable product platform with the need for local validation, agronomic support and farmer trust?

We think of this as two layers moving at different speeds and that's really how we balance it. The platform, NIP, Nature+ and our formulation science are genuinely global and scalable: the underlying biology and discovery process don't need to be reinvented for every geography. Deployment is what's local, and what actually sets our pace into each new country. That's why we work through our local partner with growers and agronomists in Kenya, validating products against Kenya's own crops, soils and climatic conditions. We've already gone through a full trial cycle, across more than three growing seasons, in partnership with multiple Kenyan organisations and in compliance with local regulators, testing row crops, fruits and vegetables, herbs and floriculture. Compared against prevailing market standards, our trials showed a yield improvement of 15-25 per cent, an 18 per cent increase in fruit diameter and crop vigour, and a 25 per cent increase in the number of fruits per plant, along with faster root and shoot development, better germination and higher plant stand counts. Agronomic support runs the same way: our partner's agronomists are the ones training growers on dosage, timing and in-season troubleshooting, because that has to happen in the field. Trust works on the same logic too, built season after season as our technology, our partner's agronomists and Kenya's growers come together in the same field, and it shows up in a farmer's life: their productivity and their income.

Looking towards 2027, what is the ambition for INERA in Africa: expanding from Kenya into East and West Africa, building local manufacturing and R&D capabilities, or establishing Africa as a major growth engine for Absolute's global biologicals business, and what milestones will determine whether the strategy is working?

Honestly, it's all three, in sequence. The immediate ambition is proving the Kenya model, commercial traction, field performance and farmer outcomes that hold up to real scrutiny, because everything else depends on that being true. We're already evaluating additional markets across East and West Africa for launches through the remainder of 2026 and into 2027, and Kenya is explicitly meant to serve as a base and a learning ground for that wider expansion. Longer-term, building local manufacturing, local R&D and field-validation infrastructure for African agro-climatic conditions is a natural next step. The milestones that matter to us are farmer-level: the number of growers actually using the products season over season,

measurable improvements in their yields, input efficiency and income. When Africa becomes a major growth engine for Absolute globally, it will be because those farmer-level numbers were real, and because we've genuinely contributed to food security and regenerative agriculture across the continent.

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