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Silent hunger

An innovative plant breeding approach

(aid) – Worldwide, billions of people suffer from a nutritional deficiency, so-called Silent Hunger. In particular, developing countries have a large deficiency in micro-nutrients, such as iron, zinc and vitamins, which lead to health problems, for example defective organ development or blindness.

As part of the international "Science Forum 2013: Nutrition and Health Outcomes: Targets for Agricultural Research" in Bonn, scientists discussed the interaction of agriculture, food intake and health consequences. Professor Joachim von Braun from the Center for Development Research at the University of Bonn and Vice President of Welthungerhilfe [World Hunger Help] examined opportunities for agricultural research to combat nutritional problems. For this, nutrient-rich foods could make a significant contribution. Innovative varieties produce plants that contain more nutrients than in average breeding. Presently, scientists work with varieties that would also be grown and consumed in developing countries. The first results were achieved by the international HarvestPlus program, by growing sweet potatoes with a higher content of vitamin A. In this way, a broad strata of the population in the city can be obtained and in the country micronutrient-rich foods can be accessed. Von Braun emphasized that successful developmental aid requires that scientists from all areas - food, agriculture, social science and health - work together.

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