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Vita Grain says priority is to support stock-piling of rice in Singapore

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Vita Grain could hold key to solving hunger woes;

by Chen Huifen

The Business Times Singapore



Group, which is backed by US \$60 million of funding, owns more than 20 different : trains of hybri give higher-yelding, healthier crops. In field trials, its hybrid lines have been show n to produce a per hectare a year - about three times the worldwide average yield o It makes the argument for hybrid ling that it's almost becor said Vita Grain chairman Gr For example, a hectare of land l about 20kg of a particular grade of hybrid rice seed to brid seeds would be needed. Since hybrid see two crops can be grown a US \$4 per kg of seeds, it wou the farmer US \$160 a year. rmal rice grains may e annual yield of 2 tonne per ha per year achieved in man e 10 tonnes per ha per year possible with Vita Grain's tries is significant ding the current ra US \$200 per tonne, the output with hybrid seeds would have raked in US for the farmer, wh ield US \$400. Apart from its higher yield, Vita Grain's hybrid seeds also boast of lower glycemic index (GI) levels (high GI food gives rise to diabetes and obesity). The company has already started mass production of the seeds on 50 ha of land in Mauritius. This will be raised to 500 ha of land by July next year and 1,000 ha of land by December next year.

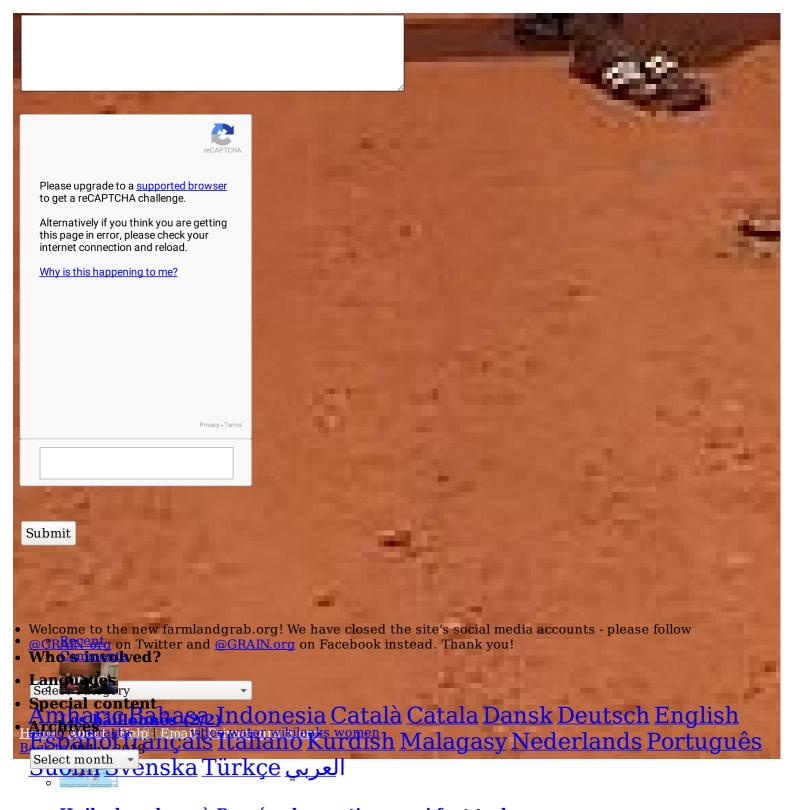
'More than 1,000 ha of seed land in Mauritius can produce, at 4 tonne per ha, 4,000 tonnes of hybrid rice seeds,' said Mr Robertson. 'And you need 40kg of hybrid seeds in one year to grow, say 10 tonnes of rice, but it's probably 16 tonnes or higher than that. So the capacity is huge.'

The impact on food security issues could also be huge. Although the Singapore-based firm is yet to have to mal discussions with authorities here, it says its priority will be to support stock-piling of rice in Singapore - which imports about 330,000 tonnes of rice a year - if the need arises.

The company counts geneticist Abed Chaudhury as its chief scientist and shareholder. Vita Grain is eyeing private equity firms with an interest in food security to raise a further US \$10-50 million for expansion.

'To develop 10,000 ha of rice would cost us about US \$25 million. US \$10 million of funding, plus our own investment, will cover that,' said Mr Robertson. He forecasts a 25 per cent return on investment over the next two to three years.





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