

Let's Make 'GMO' Politically Incorrect



By Alex Berezow — December 18, 2017

It's time to turn the forces of political correctness against themselves. If society is going to be in the dubious business of banning words, then we ought to do that because they're factually incorrect – rather than politically incorrect. And there's no better place to start than with the abbreviation "GMO."



Credit: Storyblocks [1]

Over the past few days, a controversy has erupted following claims in the *Washington Post* that the Trump Administration has banned or otherwise discouraged the use of seven words, such as "fetus" and "transgender," by the CDC and other HHS agencies. For what it's worth, CDC Director Brenda Fitzgerald has [denied](#) [2] these reports.

Lest we forget, the Obama Administration did something similar: In 2009, it began referring to acts of terrorism as "[man-caused disasters](#) [3]." Additionally, throughout its eight-year tenure, the Obama team was often hesitant to identify Islamic extremism as a unique threat to global security.

Both examples are manifestations of agenda-driven political correctness, an Orwellian attempt to change the way we think about things by forcing us to abandon common terminology in favor of "approved" verbiage. With a sympathetic press, some say the Left is largely successful at reprogramming our language, while the Right usually is not.

What all attempts at political correctness have in common is an elevation of ideology over reality.

The truth matters less than a particular political agenda. This is devastating to science because it hinders open inquiry. For example, [some scientists are already afraid](#) ^[4] of investigating biological differences between men and women out of the fear of being called sexist.

It's time to turn the forces of political correctness against themselves. If society is going to be in the dubious business of banning words, then we ought to ban them because they are factually incorrect rather than politically incorrect. And there's no better place to start than with the term "GMO."

It's Time to Go, GMO

In the journal *Trends in Biotechnology*, a team of writers* argues that the term GMO should no longer be used, especially by scientific organizations such as the International Society for Biosafety Research (ISBR). They believe that use of the term GMO:

"...feeds the popular myth that GMOs are in some way a meaningful category, ignoring, for example, the 3000+ crop varieties obtained via physical/chemical mutagenesis as well as untold numbers of plants obtained via wide crosses with embryo rescue, which are 'transgenic' in fact, if not in name."

In other words, the term GMO is arbitrarily applied to crops created with transgenic technology (usually by an evil corporation like Monsanto), but not applied to crops created through unnatural hybridizations (also usually by evil corporations like Monsanto). In both cases, an organism with new properties is produced, but only the former get stuck with the emotive label "GMO." That doesn't make biological sense, especially because hybrid plants are probably more likely to be toxic than transgenic ones. Indeed, GMOs have never killed anybody, but a [conventionally bred hybrid potato did](#) ^[5].

The authors go on:

[T]here is no satisfactory explanation of why so-called GMOs, however defined, have been the focus of 40 years of excessive attention and regulation, while very similar products – for example, herbicide-tolerant crops obtained by 'conventional' techniques, such as the Clearfield varieties obtained by crossbreeding naturally occurring varieties – are not subject to the endless, redundant red tape; over-regulation; and even outright bans of GMOs.

Instead of redefining GMOs, the authors propose scrapping the term entirely. Regulation of crops should be based on their biological attributes, not on the method used to create them.

They are factually correct, which is why it is time for the term GMO to be made politically incorrect.

**Note: I have collaborated with two of the writers, Marcel Kuntz and Henry Miller, in various capacities.*

Source [6]: Giovanni Tagliabue, Marcel Kuntz, Henry I. Miller, Klaus Ammann. "A Plea for the Renewal of the ISBR." Trends in Biotechnology. Published online: 2017. DOI: 10.1016/j.tibtech.2017.10.019

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[2] <http://time.com/5068160/cdc-banned-words-transgender/>

[3] <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-with-homeland-security-secretary-janet-napolitano-away-from-the-politics-of-fear-a-613330.html>

[4]

http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/human_nature/2011/11/boys_brains_girls_brains_how_to_think_about

[5] <https://boingboing.net/2013/03/25/the-case-of-the-poison-potato.html>

[6] [http://www.cell.com/trends/biotechnology/fulltext/S0167-7799\(17\)30283-4](http://www.cell.com/trends/biotechnology/fulltext/S0167-7799(17)30283-4)