

Some sanity on genetically engineered foods

By ACSH Staff — June 21, 2013

[1226072_eat_of_corn](#)

^[1]Will wonders never cease? The British newspaper The Guardian has [reported](#) ^[2] the sobering news that crop yields will be inadequate to feed the burgeoning world population by 2050. But that's not the amazing thing that news has been around for a while. No, what's both surprising and encouraging is that the British environment minister, Owen Paterson, has acknowledged this fact, and [warns](#) ^[3] that Europe will fall behind the rest of the world if it doesn't change its position on genetically engineered crops. In a [speech](#) ^[4] to international crop scientists, he also opined that it would be immoral if Britain did not make GM technology available to poor countries.

Of course, anti-GM activists deplore Mr. Paterson's stand, but those of us who don't buy into their ideology think that his position is a breath of fresh air. ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross had this perspective, while being appreciative of the minister's position: The EU's craven opposition to biotechnology has led to, in essence, a ban on testing and production of genetically engineered foods and feeds. Mr. Paterson's prediction will come true, if the EU regulators continue to kowtow to the environmental lobby opposing GMO agriculture out of fear and superstition.

And if one sane item on GE foods isn't rare enough, we actually have three in one day. An [article](#) ^[5] on FoodNavigator.com by Caroline Scott-Thomas entitled Crop Yield Trends Insufficient to Feed the World in 2050 completes the sweep of today's sanity doubleheader.

Ms. Scott-Thomas discusses a [study](#) ^[6] in PLoS, where the authors project the global population in 2050, and conclude that in order to feed the world, agricultural productivity will have to rise by at least 60% roughly double the output possible with current farming technology.

The answer is staring us right in the face, says ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom. Unfortunately many people can't see that far. There are genetically modified crops that flourish under conditions that would cause other crops to fail drought, high soil salinity and weed and insect pests.

Even worse, the World Food Bank [predicts](#) ^[7] that within 20 years there could be massive food shortages in sub-Saharan Africa, Pakistan and India should the climate in these areas not cooperate, or political instability in any number of areas cause massive population migrations.

Dr. Bloom adds, It is very easy for the Upper West Side dilettantes to condemn the entire science of GM agriculture while they are sitting in their penthouses eating Ben and Jerry's Cherry Garcia (soon to be GM-free!). Perhaps they should spend a few months in India and actually witness people starving.

It's amazing, but there's yet another piece of GMO news today the [2013 World Food Prize](#) ^[8] has been awarded to three scientists for founding, developing, and applying modern agricultural

biotechnology. The World Food Prize instituted by ACSH's founding trustee and Nobel laureate Norman Borlaug recognizes the achievements of individuals who have advanced human development by improving the quality, quantity or availability of food in the world.

CSH's Dr. Ruth Kava says The World Food Prize award to these scientists underlines the validity and importance of genetically engineered foods and feeds to allaying hunger and malnutrition world-wide. We can only hope that anti-GMO activists take heed and moderate their unsupportable positions (but we're not holding our collective breath!).

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[2] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/jun/20/crop-yields-world-population>

[3] http://www.foodnavigator.com/Legislation/Europe-risks-being-left-behind-on-GM-technology-says-UK-minister?utm_source=copyright&utm_medium=OnSite&utm_campaign=copyright

[4] <http://www.guwww.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/jun/20/gm-crops-food-crisis-owen-paterson>

[5] http://www.foodnavigator.com/Science-Nutrition/Crop-yield-trends-insufficient-to-feed-the-world-in-2050-Study?utm_source=copyright&utm_medium=OnSite&utm_campaign=copyright

[6] <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0066428#pone.0066428.s017>

[7] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/jun/19/climate-change-developing-countries-world-bank>

[8]

http://www.worldfoodprize.org/index.cfm/24667/24410/three_biotechnology_scientists_awarded_2013_world_food_prize