

Fear should not rule on GMOs

By ACSH Staff — October 25, 2013



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Why wouldn't consumers want to embrace a technology that could: Reduce the use of pesticides on crops; provide crops resistant to drought and high salinity in soil; enhance the nutritional value of foods; improve disease resistance in crops; prevent expansion of agriculture into marginal lands; allow the use of soil-conserving methods; and reduce the anti-nutrients in staple crops?

There's a one word answer to the query: Fear.

In a [timely and perceptive essay](#) [2] in a recent issue of *The Wall Street Journal*, Prof. Marc Van Montagu points out how genetic engineering has already cut the use of insecticide spraying in India by over 25 percent, saved the Hawaiian papaya industry from viral disease, and developed a virus-resistant strain of cassava, a starchy root that is a staple in parts of Africa, among myriad other benefits. Dr. Van Montagu is a molecular biologist from Ghent University in Belgium, who is one of the 2013 recipients of the World Food Prize often referred to as the Nobel Prize of Agriculture.

And yet consumers are still on the fence (at least in the US) about the technology. Fueled by anti-GMO activists and certainly by the multi-billion dollar organic food industry, many fearful consumers are demanding that GMO-containing foods and ingredients be labeled so they can be avoided. This measure was voted down in California last year, but numerous states have similar measures on the ballot this year. The one attracting the most attention now is I-522 in Washington state.

Van Montagu points out:

Opponents of GM crops have been extremely effective at spreading misinformation. GM crops don't, as one discredited study claimed recently, cause cancer or other diseases. GM cotton isn't responsible for suicides among Indian farmers a 2008 study by an alliance of 64 governments and nongovernmental organizations debunked that myth completely. And GM crops don't harm bees or monarch butterflies.

He continues In fact, people have consumed billions of meals containing GM foods in the 17 years since they were first commercialized, and not one problem has been documented.

ACSH s Dr. Ruth Kava s perspective is, It s truly mind-boggling that this technology, which has already provided so many benefits and will continue to do so, is being demonized to such a great extent. It s a sad commentary on how susceptible a population deficient in scientific understanding can be to fearmongering activists with a scary agenda.

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