

On GMOs, is it, He said, She said? No: she s an honored scientist, he s a cookbook writer with a vegan bent

By ACSH Staff — March 25, 2015



In today s *NY Times*, food columnist Mark Bittman goes overboard as

usual in a rant disguised as a critique of our system of chemical regulation, and veers off into his true love: spewing bilious insinuations about GMO food. Cleverly titled [Stop making us guinea pigs](#) [1], he rails at Monsanto s herbicide glyphosate (Roundup), designated as a probable carcinogen by the precautionary IARC. Inspired apparently by his own verbiage, he then launches into a generalized attack on all chemicals in our environment, wondering why our government (which cannot find its mouth with its hands most days) cannot protect us from all their evil predations.

Here is an example of his frothings: *There is a sad history of us acting as guinea pigs for the novel chemicals that industry develops. For this we have all too often paid with our damaged health. Rarely is that damage instantaneous, but it s safe to say that novel biotechnologies broadly deployed may well have unexpected consequences. Yet unlike Europeans, Canadians, Australians and others, we don t subscribe to the precautionary principle, which maintains that it s better to prevent damage than repair it. We ask not whether a given chemical might cause cancer but whether we re certain that it does.*

And:

... the job of the F.D.A. should be to guarantee a reasonable expectation of protection from danger, not to wait until people become sick before taking products off the market.

Where to begin? One way would be to point out that the FDA has nothing much to say about glyphosate, nor most environmental chemicals: that's the job of the EPA and the USDA, but how would Bittman know that? He's a chef, and a vegan one at that, bitterly opposed to GMOs at all costs.

Compare his vituperation, based solely on his own whims of what good food is and his masters at the organic lobby, with these positions of renowned scientist, former head of the AAAS, and a member of the National Academy of the Sciences, Dr. Nina Federoff:

GM crops have been in commercial production for almost 20 years, they have an impeccable safety record and multiple environmental benefits, said Federoff, during her testimony yesterday morning. [GM crops] have boosted farmers incomes and reduced consumer prices.

Organic food marketers have demonized GMOs, while advancing organically-grown foods as more healthful than conventionally-grown foods, according to [Federoff's testimony](#) [2]. She says anti-GMO activists openly state that GMO labeling laws will help drive GMOs out of the market. (NOTE: on page 6 of her transcript, Dr. Federoff cites ACSH's writings on this subject).

Attaching a GM label provides no consumer benefits since GM foods are as safe and nutritious as their non-GM counterparts, Federoff told the committee, but attaching a label will send the false message that there's something to worry about because the FDA's labels are there to alert consumers to food ingredients with health implications.

Fedoroff cites a statistic that only 37 percent of the general public believes that GMOs are safe, while 90 percent of the scientific community believes they're safe.

Now the facts are these, Federoff testified, organic produce is no more nutritious than conventionally-grown produce. It's more expensive because organic farming is land inefficient and labor intensive; the organic industry's false and misleading marketing are a primary reason why consumers believe GMOs are bad and organic food is good.

For solid science-backed perspective, see ACSH's [publications here](#) [3].

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Links

[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/25/opinion/stop-making-us-guinea-pigs.html>

[2]

<https://agriculture.house.gov/sites/republicans.agriculture.house.gov/files/images/Dr.%20Nina%20Fedoroff%20Written>

[3] <http://acsh.org/2014/03/food-feeding-world-modern-agricultural-biotechnology-2/>