

Jane Brody on GMOs they re good for people and the planet

By ACSH Staff — June 9, 2015



The *NY Times* has printed the truth about GMOs in Jane Brody s weekly

[column](#) ^[1] on health. Until this point, the paper of record has been more likely to print unsubstantiated fears about GMOs in pieces from Nick Kristoff and Michael Pollan, to name just two. But in her column Ms. Brody points out the benefits to people and the planet from genetic engineering.

Although the USDA has announced a voluntary certification program for food companies that wish to label their products as GMO-free, Jane Brody explains that the movement towards such labeling relies on fears, not facts. Companies (and some states) are trying to cash in on perceived consumer preferences for non-GMO products. But Brody clearly states a review of the pros and cons of G.M.O.s strongly suggests that the issue reflects a poor public understanding of the science behind them.

Further, she bewails the fact that American foodstuffs that could save millions of lives have been rejected by some third world countries because they were produced with genetic engineering technology. One example of misled concern involves Golden Rice, which she correctly points out could save millions of children in the impoverished regions of Asia in particular from blindness and death, but whose development has been vigorously opposed by Greenpeace and its clones.

Yet another GMO she cites is addition of a gene to increase iron production in rice, which will help fight anemia in consumers.

Not only can GMO foods benefit consumers health but, perhaps counterintuitively, they can actually be more beneficial to the environment than conventional methods. Genetically engineered salmon grow faster, and reduce the need for wild fish feed, and some GMO corn has improved drought tolerance. Brody also points out that the fears about cross-species gene movement are without merit since most species already share thousands if not millions of genes. As the *Sacramento Bee* [pointed](#)

[2] out, genetic engineering has produced rice, tomatoes as well as corn, that are more drought-tolerant than their non-GMO counterparts. Further, herbicide-resistant crops allow for less tillage of farm fields, thus reducing runoff and loss of topsoil.

One myth spread by anti-GMO groups is that genetically engineered foods are not tested for safety. Brody counters that every G.M.O. must be evaluated and approved by the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency before it can be marketed. Developers must test the product for toxicity and allergenicity, as well as assure that its nutrient content is at least as good as its non-G.M.O. counterpart. And she also states that traditionally bred crops are not given anywhere near that level of oversight. They do not need FDA approval at all. And we have not outlawed peanuts, shellfish or strawberries even though they can be the sources of life-threatening allergic reactions.

ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava says I was delighted to read Jane Brody's column, since she has emphasized the truth about genetically engineered foods. She has underlined the benefits to both human health and the environment in a clear and consumer-friendly manner, much as ACSH has done in its recent publication *Food and You*, which is available [here](#) [3].

ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross had this to say: Ms. Brody certainly makes a valuable contribution to ameliorating the mythology impeding consumers and worse, some nations who could use this technology uptake of GMO-containing foods. She declines to take on the precautionary, fear-mongering groups whose political agendas are contributing to the hesitation among many to approve biotech crops. And she should be criticized to some extent for not addressing the travesty of the AquaBounty salmon, whose GM qualities for accelerated growth she praises, yet neglects to identify the higher-ups in our own government who have needlessly trapped this fish somewhere in the bowels of the regulatory thicket.

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[1] <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/06/08/fears-not-facts-support-gmo-free-food/?ref=health>

[2] <http://www.sacbee.com/opinion/op-ed/soapbox/article22949214.html>

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