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GMOS: WHAT'S THE DEBATE ABOUT?

BY M. OSTARELLO MARCH 18, 2016

Genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, are living organisms in which the DNA has been altered with the genetic material of another species. Most GMOs are plants that have been modified to withstand the application of herbicides; the weeds die and the farmers' crops survive. In one odd instance, to study human-genetic disorders, Chinese geneticists took the bioluminescence DNA from jellyfish and inserted it into the genes of pig embryos, creating piglets that glow in the dark when put under a black light.

So, why, if GMOs offer benefits to farmers and medical studies, are more and more consumers becoming alarmed? Because today, more than 90% of all soy and corn sold in the United States has been genetically modified, along with sugar beets and canola oil. Not only are these commodity crops our staples, but they're also common ingredients in many processed foods. In fact, 80% of the food in the U.S. contains some GMOs, and while Big Food, chemical companies, many biotech scientists and world organizations insist GMOs are safe, critics claim genetically modified foods raise serious health concerns.

According to the American Academy of Environmental Medicine, "several animal studies indicate serious health risks associated with GM food consumption including infertility, immune dysregulation, accelerated aging, dysregulation of genes associated with cholesterol synthesis, insulin regulation, cell signaling, and protein formation, and changes in the liver, kidney, spleen and gastrointestinal system."

And, although some attempts at genetic engineering have been done to increase nutritional value, The Institute for Responsible Technology states that the two most engineered traits are "herbicide tolerance and the ability of the plant to produce its own pesticide. These results have no health benefit, only economic benefit."

Even worse, not only have GMO crops become tolerant to herbicides, so have weeds, creating “super-weeds” which require even heavier applications of most toxic chemicals such as glyphosate, commonly known as Roundup. Scientific American recently reported that the World Health Organization declared “glyphosate a probable carcinogen.”

Unfortunately for Americans, the United States has the loosest restrictions worldwide. According to the United States Library of Congress, “Compared to other countries, regulation of GMOs in the U.S. is relatively favorable to their development. ...the U.S. is the world’s leading producer of genetically modified (GM) crops.”

Currently the debate has moved into the spotlight on the political stage. Since the federal government won’t pass more stringent laws regarding GMO use, states have taken matters into their own hands. In 2014, Governor Pete Shumlin of Vermont passed one of the nation’s first mandatory labeling laws for GMOs, which requires all foods that are genetically modified or have genetically modified ingredients to be labeled as such. The law goes into effect on July 1, 2016, and legislation currently in Congress and backed by the Big Food lobby is trying to stop the law from taking effect, arguing that state-by-state labeling requirements would make it challenging for the food industry to comply.

Many consumers nowadays want to be informed about the GMOs in their foods. Until laws mandate that the food industry tells us which foods contain GMOs, we can only rely on those responsible companies that can assure us no GMOs have been used. Look for the label “non-GMO” or “no GMOs” to be sure.

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GMO Education

What is a GMO? A GMO (genetically modified organism) is the result of a laboratory process where genes from the DNA of one species are extracted and artificially forced into the genes of an unrelated plant or animal. The foreign genes may come from bacteria, viruses, insects, animals or even humans. Because this involves the ... Continue reading



Institute for Responsible Technology

Health Risks

"Several animal studies indicate serious health risks associated with genetically modified (GM) food (AAEM 2009)," including infertility, immune problems, accelerated aging, faulty insulin regulation, and changes in major organs and the gastrointestinal system. The AAEM has asked physicians to advise all patients to avoid GM foods.[1] Starting in 1996, Americans have been eating genetically modified (GM) ... Continue reading



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