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Why Not Genetically Modified Organic Crops?

Ronald Bailey | Jan. 30, 2009 2:09 pm



Slate is running a [timid article](#) asking, "Could Frankenfoods be good for the environment?" Damned right they are! As I have [argued](#):

Although organic farmers refuse to see it, switching to genetically enhanced crops would go a long way toward accomplishing their avowed goals of restoring their land and helping the natural environment.

Now, comes the *Slate* article reviewing a new book, *Tomorrow's Table: Organic Farming, Genetics, and the Future of Food* by two University of California, Davis agricultural experts, Pamela Ronald and Raoul Adamchak. And it looks a like a very interesting book indeed. According the the UC Davis press release the authors:

...assert that genetically engineered, organically grown crops offer a one-two punch for boosting food production in an environmentally conscious way. The husband and wife point out that the process of genetic engineering can contribute to the development of improved seeds that organic farmers can use...

"Unnecessarily pitting GE [genetically engineered] and organic farming against each other only prevents the transformative changes needed on our farms," Ronald said. "Without the use of genetically engineered seed, the impact of ecologically oriented farming practices will likely remain small. Despite tremendous growth in the last 15 years, organic farming is still less than 3 percent of all U.S. agriculture.

"Genetic engineering enables us to introduce critically important traits into crop plants -- traits such as resistance to disease and insects or tolerance for environmental stresses like flood, droughts, cold, heat and salty water and soils," she said. "It has been very difficult to develop these traits in crops through conventional breeding."



The *Slate* article closes:

Given the potential of these products to reduce the environmental impact of farming, it's ironic that traditional advocates for sustainable agriculture have led a successful campaign to blacklist GMOs irrespective of their applications. At the very least, they might treat them as legitimate ethical and scientific matters deserving of a fair public hearing.


Well, yes.

Ronald Bailey is a science correspondent at *Reason* magazine and author of **The End of Doom** (July 2015).

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