

GM FOODS FACTSHEET

What is Genetic Engineering?

Genetic Engineering transfers genetic material (hereditary information) from one species to another (from fish to plant, from bacteria to pig, from human to sheep). Unlike traditional breeding, genetic engineering bypasses the boundaries of species and the natural process of evolution.

Are Genetically Engineered/Modified Foods safe to eat?

There are no guarantees that GM products are safe and the consequences are impossible to predict and to reverse. The British government's Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes assesses GM foods for market approval. It relies on the information provided by the applying companies and corporations rather than calling for independent tests.

Genetic engineering adds a completely new component to our diet and nobody knows how this will affect our health. We are the guinea pigs. Engineered foods have already triggered allergic reactions and can cause toxic poisoning. Crops engineered to be resistant to weedkillers will increase the use of such chemicals, the residue of which will accumulate in our food and water.

Are we already eating Genetically Modified Foods?

Genetically modified soya, maize and tomato paste are already on the market. Soya and maize together are used in nearly 80% of processed food products, such as bread, margarine and baby food. Genetically modified soya and maize are already being fed in an unprocessed form to animals which are then consumed as meat, poultry and farmed fish.

Genetically modified soya contains genetic material taken from a bacteria, the petunia flower and a virus. It has been developed by Monsanto, a giant US agrochemical corporation, to create a plant that resists Monsanto's very own all purpose weedkiller (herbicide). When the weedkiller is sprayed, the soya plant survives while everything around dies.

Genetically modified maize is engineered to tolerate weed-killers and produce its own pesticide which kills certain insects. Some maize from Novartis (a multinational biotech corporation) contains a bacterial gene which gives resistance to antibiotics. This is regarded as a serious risk to public and animal health by many scientists. Three countries in Europe have opted to ban GM maize (Austria, Luxembourg, Norway).

How will Genetic Engineering affect the Environment?

GM foods may either become weeds themselves or breed with wild relatives to produce "superweeds" which will be very hard to control. GM crops which have produce their own pesticides force pests to develop resistance and controlling the pests could get out of hand. Beneficial creatures such as ladybirds, bees, birds and frogs are also being affected.

Will GM Foods be labelled?

Most GM foods will not be properly labelled under current European Union legislation. Products that contain genetically engineered protein or DNA have to be labelled by law. Most supermarkets, however, refuse to label widely used ingredients such as vegetable oils, lecithin and starch derived from GM crops, as well as products from animals fed on GM crops.

What is to come?

Many more crops, such as oil seed rape, sugar beet, strawberries and potatoes are currently being engineered and likely to be on the market soon.

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Is it possible to avoid GM Foods?

Organic food is non-GM. The label of the Soil Association guarantees organic and non-GM food. Also: Iceland's 'own brand' products are made without GM-soya. A few other companies are also in the process of phasing out GM foods.

Further Information

For further information on the subject of GM foods, you can contact the following organisations, please send a large SAE:

The Soil Association
40-56 Victoria Street
Bristol
BS1 6ZY
Tel: 0117 929 0661

Friends of the Earth
26-28 Underwood Street
London N1 7JQ
Tel: 0171 490 1555

The Food Commission
94 White Lion Street
London N1 9PF
Tel: 0171 837 2250