

Biotech regulation: Are democracy and science in conflict?

In the last few weeks, [Kenya](#) and Peru issued blanket bans on the importation of GMOs, India's regulatory system struggled with [a backlash of popular opinion](#) against GMOs, a [march has been taking place](#) across Costa Rica in opposition to Monsanto's GM crops and in the United States the FDA's overview of the [so-called "Frankenfish"](#) — a genetically modified Atlantic salmon that grows twice as fast as unmodified salmon — [has stalled](#).

What all of these issues have in common is confusion about the benefits and potential dangers of GMOs. Why do GMOs fester in regulatory limbo for so long? Some of these debates have been ongoing for years.

Henry Miller, writing at *Forbes*, argues this confusion is all just a byproduct of [political meddling](#), driven by a desire to pander and a disregard for science.

Democratic governments — and the regulatory agencies, politicians, and legislators within — are obligated to listen to their constituents. In the case of regulatory issues that affect health, safety, food supply for millions, we all seem to agree that policymakers should make decisions based on empirical evidence. The problem is that we don't create reality by agreement; we uncover it through the process of science.

Any regulatory agency attempting to address both science and people's fears is bound to come into internal conflict; many of our strongest fears are not based in science. Indeed, it's an old argument that ignorance itself is the basis of fear.

One way around this conflict is the solution Miller proposes: our governments should ignore public opinion when it comes to regulatory decisions and make them based purely on fact — assuming the facts are not in dispute.

The other way around is to do a better job informing people, eliminating — or at least tempering — the conflict that impacts any and all biotech regulation by bringing public opinion on the science of genetic engineering and the reality of genetic engineering into closer accord.

Additional Resources:

- ["Kenya issues blanket GMO ban,"](#) Genetic Literacy Project