

GMOs may feed the world using fewer pesticides

Walter De Jong shouts over the roar of fans in the greenhouse. He's telling me about the seedlings beside him, which pepper the dark soil in a grid of small planting pots. De Jong, a potato breeder and geneticist at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, hopes that at least one of the plants will yield a best seller, but it's far more likely that they'll amount to compost.

De Jong produced the plants in the same old, laborious way that his father did before him. He collected pollen from a plant that produces potatoes that fry as potato chips should and then sprinkled the pollen on the flower of a potato plant that resists viruses. If the resulting potatoes bear their parents' finest features—and none of the bad ones—De Jong will bury them in the ground next year and test their mettle against a common potato virus. If they survive—and are good for frying and eating—he and his team will repeat this for 13 years to ensure that problematic genes did not creep in during the initial cross.

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