

Popular arguments against GMOs countered among inflammatory debate

In the September issue, the editors of *Scientific American* published a carefully reasoned [explanation](#) for why they oppose mandatory labeling of genetically modified foods. Rather than stimulating discussion however, their editorial led to hundreds of inflammatory comments posted on the magazine's webpage by anti-GMO activists.

This past weekend, Amy Harmon of the *New York Times* wrote a [second GMO-related article](#), this time focusing on the vandalism of test plots of Golden Rice in the Philippines, which several prominent anti-GMO communities, including Greenpeace, celebrated as an act of the 'people's will.' Harmon's article, which carefully addresses the scientific consensus that Golden Rice is both safe and necessary, also resulted in a fusillade of inflamed comments.

Most of the criticisms of GMO food fit a particular pattern of pseudoscience and widely propagated myth. "As predicted," writes Emil Karlsson, a Swedish science writer and founder of the well regarded [Debunking Denialism](#) blog, "the anti-GMO activists were not discouraged one bit by the Scientific American article and tried to drown out the science-based arguments showing that GM foods are stringently tested, heavily regulated and safe, both for human consumption and the environment."

Karlsson reviews many of many of the familiar anti-GMO claims, but also frames the discouraging lack of rational discourse by many crop biotechnology critics.

When you come across a claim that you disagree with, the rational approach is to providing arguments and evidence against it. People who do not have any tend to resort to a number of logical fallacies, cognitive simplifications or thought-terminating clichés. One such key example is the dismissal of any evidence or arguments in favor of genetically modified foods by deploying the shill gambit. In the context of *Scientific American* and genetically modified foods, this amounts to the bare assertion that some large corporation that deals with GM crops, seeds or foods (often Monsanto) must have paid them off to publish [the editorial against GM-food labeling]. This conveniently allows the reduction of cognitive dissonance without having to address any of the actual arguments.

Read the full, original story here: ["Decimating the flawed beliefs of anti-GMO activists"](#)

Addition resources:

- ["20 questions on genetically modified foods,"](#) World Health Organization
- ["Food for bots: Distinguishing the novel from the knee-jerk in the GMO debate,"](#) Grist
- ["Mother Jones's Philpott supports Pollan "talking points" attack on NYTimes GM orange story,"](#) Genetic Literacy Project