

Opponents of GM crops like Golden Rice are 'wicked', says UK Environment Secretary, setting off tempest

In a sharp rebuke of opponents of GM technology, UK Environmental Secretary Owen Paterson told [The Independent](#) that those who oppose Golden Rice are “wicked...casting a shadow over attempts to feed the world.”

Despite the [decades of research](#) on the safety of GMOs and the assurance that Golden Rice will be given away for free, opponents continue to claim that it is a '[Trojan Horse](#)' for GM technology that will ultimately harm human health and the environment.

Secretary Paterson, an ardent supporter of Golden Rice, said, “It’s just disgusting that little children are allowed to go blind and die because of a hang-up by a small number of people about this technology.” He reiterated that there was no scientific evidence that GMOs posed any threat to human health or the environment.

In a separate article, *The Guardian* [pointed out](#) that the comments by Secretary Paterson coincided with statements made by other proponents of Golden Rice, including [Patrick Moore](#), a former high-ranking Greenpeace member who now is an activist for crop biotechnology. Moore’s non-profit organization, [Allow Golden Rice Now](#), advocates for the innovation. Many prominent scientists, under the banner *Science* magazine, also [condemned the vandalism](#) of a Golden Rice field trial in the Philippines by anti-GMO activists, an attack that was [supported](#) by Greenpeace.

The Guardian’s [Karl Mathiesen](#) set up a [forum](#) for readers to contribute to the debate, which prompted hundreds of responses, including one from [Alexander J Stein](#), an agricultural economist with the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, DC, whose PhD focused on Golden Rice.

“The key conclusion is that Golden Rice offers a very promising intervention that could complement other current interventions, above all supplementation with vitamin A pills,” Stein wrote. He suggested that instead of attacking GMOs by claiming health and environmental risks, critics should instead target the “framework in which GM crops are developed,” which would include “the promotion of weaker patent rights [or] the facilitation of more competition in the field of agricultural biotechnology.”

Another *Guardian* journalist, [Claire Provost](#), offered more context to Secretary Paterson’s remarks, discussing the [protests](#) against this year’s World Food Prize winners, who have all have made contributions to agriculture biotechnology. One of the winners, Robert Farley, is a chief technology officer for Monsanto and another, Mary-Dell Chilton, is a scientist and founder of Syngenta Biotechnology.. “The World Food Prize has been criticized for prioritizing biotechnology over other strategies for achieving food security,” Provost wrote.

The hundreds of other comments were spread across Twitter and Facebook, encompassing a wide range of views, both negative and positive of Golden Rice.

Vitamin A deficiency affects 40% of children in the developing world and can cause serious health issues. Golden Rice, which is fortified with beta-carotene, is said to be able to provide 60% of daily required intake of vitamin A. Though there have been efforts to combat the widespread deficiency with better farming practices and food distribution, a solution using biotechnology is strongly supported by the scientific community.

Additional Resources:

- ["Opponents of third world GM crops are 'wicked', says Environment Secretary Owen Paterson,"](#) Independent
- ["GM crops: is opposition to golden rice wicked?"](#) Guardian
- ["GM golden rice opponents branded 'wicked' by UK environment secretary,"](#) Guardian