

Campaign to block McDonald's healthier GM french fries threatens next generation consumer friendly GM foods

The biotech company Simplot is marketing its GM potato as a healthier and more environmentally friendly choice. The potatoes have reduced black spots from bruising—which means more potatoes could be marketable every year, reducing waste—and they are safer to fry because they produce less asparagine, an amino acid that can become carcinogenic when it reacts with sugar.

The emerging debate over the Simplot potato highlights a growing divide over GM technology, writes Marc Gunther, editor at large of the Sustainable Business section at the *Guardian*. Despite clear health and environmental benefits, several anti-biotech groups, including Food and Water Watch and the Center for Food Safety, are urging McDonald's to reject the GM potato, alleging serious health risks.

Sorting through these claims and counter-claims about the risks and benefit of genetic engineering is difficult, even for an informed layman. That's one of the problems with the GMO debate: It gets emotional very quickly and often comes down to questions of trust. Here the anti-GMO forces have an advantage. They can position themselves as consumer advocates – public interest groups, if you will. By comparison, the companies that favor GMOs are seen as self-interested and lacking credibility. Government regulators also, generally, don't inspire trust.

Companies seeking regulatory approval for genetically modified potatoes, salmon and apples have run into some opposition from anti-GMO NGOs, conventional farmers who fear their brand might be tarnished and opportunistic organic-focused retailers like Whole Foods Market. If these second generation GM products—innovations focused on meeting consumer needs rather than making production more efficient for farmers—fail in the marketplace, companies will be loathe to invest further in plant biotechnology.

McDonald's already uses GM corn and oil from GM soybeans, not to mention the GM corn and soy that feeds the cows that become its burgers. A spokeswoman for McDonald's says that their decision to use the GM potatoes will be guided by “food, industry and regulatory experts.” Haven Baker, Simplot's vice president of plant science, is confident that the US Department of Agriculture will conduct a thorough review and that a Food and Drug Administration review is underway to deliver an “important endorsement of food safety.”

If McDonald's is guided by science, Gunther writes, it should embrace the GM potatoes. But “for better or worse, consumer attitudes will factor into the company's decision.”

Read the full, original story here: [McDonald's GMO dilemma: why fries are causing such a fuss](#)

Additional resources:

- [Anti-biotech group attempts to pressure McDonald's into not using GM potato](#), American Council on Science and Health
- [How the 'Poison Potato' impacted the GMO debate](#), Boing Boing