

Video: Hofstra GMO debate highlights science v precautionary fears

In early December, Hofstra University [hosted](#) a debate on GMOs titled “Should the US Enact Regulations against Genetically Modified Crops?”

Speaking in support of the notion were Michael Hansen, chief scientist at Consumers Union and Bhavani Jaroff, chef and author of the [I Eat Green](#) blog.

Speaking in opposition were Kevin Folta, interim chair of the Department of Horticultural Sciences at the University of Florida, and Gregory Dolan, Associate Professor of Law and Co-director of the Center for Medicine and Law at the University of Baltimore.

In his opening statements, Hansen argued that the Food and Drug Administration requires little to no testing on genetically modified crops because “cooperation between seed companies and the FDA is purely voluntary” and that seed companies do not allow independent researchers to test GM seeds. He also cited various research articles that allegedly show toxic effects of the Bt protein, a natural pesticide engineered into some GM crops on ladybugs and humans.

In response, Folta maintained that Hansen’s claims were based on fear “and that none of them has been proven.” The FDA require testing of GM seeds, he said. He said the agency should decrease the regulatory hurdles and not increase them. According to Folta, it can take up to 10 years to “satisfy the FDA,” which does not have a “hard and fast” protocol so that it can adjust their requirements for each new case. He also noted that hundreds of studies have not yet found evidence that GM crops harm humans or the environment. “Any person who actually finds harm from a GM crop [would] have his picture on *Science* and *Nature*,” Folta said.

Bhavani Jaroff, who has no scientific background and is a well known anti-GMO campaigner, made several claims commonly made by biotechnology opponents, such as that there are “no independent studies” on GMO safety (in reality there are [hundreds of independent studies](#) and about 2000 total overall). She claimed that “pesticides are injected into genes” and are regenerated in the human body—a scientifically incorrect statement—and that the recently [retracted](#) Seralini study was only retracted “because of a complaint by Monsanto”—there is no evidence of that, as the [Genetic Literacy Project](#) has reported. She also cited a paper which purported to find traces of glyphosate in maternal and fetal tissue—a study that was [debunked](#) by the scientific community.

Gregory Dolan challenged a statement made by Hansen that scientists can buy a GM crop from any farmer and “once it is in [his] hands, the law says [he] can do with it” whatever he wants. In fact, a farmer cannot sell patented seeds, but can sell her crop. He also pointed to [Chakrabarty v Diamond](#), a Supreme Court case that established the right to patent GM organisms.

In closing, Folta reiterated that biotech companies do meet with the FDA before beginning testing, and do additional required tests as needed.

Additional Resources:

- [Biofortified debates Consumers Union over GMO regulation, safety and labeling](#), Biofortified
- [Crop scientist: Glyphosate safe, does not interrupt nutrient uptake in roots](#), GMO Answers
- [With 2000+ global studies confirming safety, GM foods among most analyzed subjects in science](#), Genetic Literacy Project