

Nathaneal Johnson: All or nothing debate over GMOs—Does any of it matter?

According to *Grist's* Nathanael Johnson, the hard line opponents of agricultural biotechnology are in an ideological fever. To them, GMOs are Exhibit A for technological hubris and the rogue economic power of multinational corporations out to dominate the global food supply—an “industrial complex”. But the stakes, he claims, are really far lower. To make his controversial point, he posits parallel universes in which each side wins.

In the GMO-free future, farming still looks pretty much the same. The banning of GMOs hasn't led to a transformation of agriculture because GM seed was never a linchpin supporting the conventional food system: Farmers [could always do fine without it](#).

In the other alternate future, where the pro-GMO side wins, we see less insecticide, more herbicide, and less tillage. Genetic engineering is just one tool in the tinkerer's belt. Newer tools are already available, and scientists continue to make [breakthroughs](#) with traditional breeding. So in this future, a few more genetically engineered plants and animals get their chance to compete. Some make the world a little better, while others cause unexpected problems. But the science has moved beyond basic genetic engineering, and most of the risks and benefits of progress are coming from other technologies. Life goes on.

I'm not opposed to using GMOs as a metaphor to discuss our technological hubris (or prowess) — I just want us to be explicit about it. We should notice when the metaphor begins to diverge from the ground truth. The facts on the ground, in turn, can help us adjust our thinking on the larger issue.

Read full, original article: [What I learned from six months of GMO research: None of it matters](#)

Additional resources:

- [Grist's Nathanael Johnson's GMO archives: Wading through the ideological thicket](#)
- [20 answers on GMOs: What would conversation be like if we discarded ideology?](#)