

Grist for the genetic engineering mill

A “what I’ve learned about GMOs” (“genetically modified organisms”) end-of-the-year [column](#) by Nathanael Johnson, *Grist*’s food writer, would ordinarily not warrant much attention (from me, at least), but this one was [cited](#) by the *New York Times*’ Andy Revkin as “a rich series of reports” on various aspects of the subject. Revkin also quoted [Grist’s own description](#) of Johnson’s articles as “a level-headed assessment of the evidence in plain English [which is] in pretty short supply.”

Unlike many journalists who write about genetic engineering, Johnson makes a real effort to get it right, and in much of his piece (which contains many links to his earlier, more detailed articles), he succeeds (except for an unfortunate tendency to give a lot of ink to notorious anti-biotech liars and charlatans). But Johnson suffers from the non-expert’s incomplete understanding of the nuances concerning the continuum of genetic engineering technologies.

Especially disappointing was his discussion of the differences between “conventional” plant breeding genetic engineering techniques and more recent molecular genetic engineering. That point is critical because the misconceptions that molecular genetic engineering is somehow fundamentally different from its precursors, and that its products constitute a distinct “category,” underlie activists’ and regulators’ antagonism toward the newer techniques.

Read the full, original article: [Grist For The Genetic Engineering Mill](#)