Black Swan author Nassim Taleb warns of unpredictable dangers from GMOs

New York University professor Nassim Taleb, author of *The Black Swan,* which many believe foreshadowed the events leading up to the Great Recession, is now weighing in on the GMO issue. He and two colleagues–Yaneer Bar-Yam from the New England Complex Systems Institute and Rupert Read, University of East Anglia philosophy professor–have written a paper, The Precautionary Principle (with Application to the Genetic Modification of Organisms) that they claim brings probability theory to the issue of whether GMOS might introduce "systemic risk" to the environment. The crux of Taleb's argument:

Top-down modi?cations to the system (through GMOs) are categorically and statistically different from bottom up ones (regular farming, progressive tinkering with crops, etc.) There is no comparison between the tinkering of selective breeding and the top-down engineering of taking a gene from an organism and putting it into another.

Taleb is not a scientist and most geneticists would dispute his generalized, and some would say simplistic, characterization of genetic engineering. He goes on to argue that the chance of ecocide, or the destruction of the environment and potentially humans, increases incrementally with each additional transgenic trait introduced into the environment. He's not saying that human ignorance to the potential risks presented by GMOs will doom the planet by 8:34 a.m. on Aug. 13, 2082 — choreographing potential events as absolute certainties as many financial pundits do. Nor is he specifying which trait or traits will combine to cause which specific environmental disaster. Taleb doesn't deal in specifics; he deals in probability. He's simply saying that given enough time and enough new traits (or ignorance) something big, such as ecocide, is almost guaranteed to occur.

Read the full original article: Is Nassim Taleb Right About Monsanto Company and GMOs?

Read the Nassim Taleb paper here: The Precautionary Principle