

Plant geneticist Paul Gepts says polarized GM discussion endangers innovation

Whether you call them transgenic, genetically engineered or GMO crops, the fever-pitched debate about Monsanto misses the bigger picture by a long shot, according to Professor Paul Gepts of the University of California, Davis.

As a plant geneticist with a global understanding of seed varieties, Gepts supports [public breeding programs](#) and developing new varieties that benefit the public at large. (He does not receive any funding or compensation from private seed companies, including Monsanto.)

Do you think the discussion around genetically engineered crops is too polarized?

Absolutely. I think it's just unbelievable. There is no middle ground. You are either completely for it or completely against it. Way too much energy is wasted on a technique that is useful. But it's by no means the answer to everything.

Is marker-assisted cross-breeding safer than genetic engineering?

The way to judge any technology is to look at it on a case-by-case basis. Take radioisotopes. They can be used to make bombs, and they are also used in medicine. So the issue is, which application are we talking about?

[By 2050, there will be 9 billion people](#). That's a lot of mouths to feed. Can both transgenics and marker-assisted cross-breeding help us handle our growing population and changing climate?

There have been tremendous yield increases over the last century. Half of the increases can be attributed to improved plant genetics. But the other half comes from other practices which you could call agroecology. You learn how to grow the crop better. There's definitely going to be a need to increase our agricultural production, but it's not going to depend only on genetics. These are tools. They are not the goal in itself.

Read the full, original article: [Genetic engineering, not GMO's, is worth debate](#)