

## Oklahoma State University's chief wheat breeder claims GM wheat's promises oversold

The wheat industry has been working for years to gain access to the same technology used to develop high-tech seed for corn, soybeans and other crops, but at least one prominent breeder has qualms about the potential drawbacks of rushing to introduce genetically modified wheat. "Among consumers, there are a lot of myths and fallacies being spread, but I think they are also being spread on the science side," said Brett Carver, chief wheat breeder at Oklahoma State University. "There've been some promises made about GM wheat that I don't think are true or are being overstated."

His main complaint is the way wheat has been portrayed as lagging behind other crops with the blame often placed on a lack of genetic modification. Carver is currently helping to edit a technical book that follows advancements in 16 major field crops and says studies show wheat is more than holding its own. Carver contends changing climate trends in the last 25 years have benefited corn and beans more than GM seed development has. Most of the yield gains breeders have achieved are the result of taking advantage of a longer growing season and the ability to plant earlier in the spring, he said. In addition, the most common application of GM technology so far — herbicide resistance — "protects rather than increases" yields, Carver noted.

One of his main concerns with genetic modification is it represents "the most expensive tool in the toolbox."

"I do want to be able to use the technology, but I want to use it responsibly," Carver said. "What that means is, if I use it, I'm going to use it as a last resort. Why? Because of cost and because of public opposition." He fears wheat farmers are hearing one message on GM technology: that the wheat industry can't successfully compete with other crops or make significant improvements without it.

"We've now got farmers convinced that genetic modification will give us wheat that will grow on three inches of rain and that it's the only way to solve our problems. That's how destructive the conversation has become," he said.

The National Association of Wheat Growers' official policy supports GM wheat. "We are supportive of any research effort that will increase the yield and profitability for the farmer," said Paul Penner, of Hillsboro, Kan., the current NAWG president. "We cannot ignore the potential benefits of GM technology in wheat." Penner said he wants to see farmers provided with a full range of options and then let the marketplace dictate which products succeed.

**Read the full, original article:** [Wheat breeder: GMO's promise oversold](#)