

Nobel laureate in medicine: GMOs are 'key tool' to address global hunger

Each year several million children either die or suffer irreparable developmental defects because of vitamin A deficiency. Countless others are harmed by malnutrition and starvation. Yet many of these deaths would be preventable if we addressed them head on and used the tools that exist to stop them. One of the key tools is the use of genetically modified organisms, known better as GMOs.

The battle over genetically modified crops is rife with business interests and political opportunism. When GMOs were first produced in laboratories around the world, they were rightly heralded as a tremendous leap forward in our ability to supplement nature by providing high-nutrient foods. But when Monsanto, the world's largest GMO producer, tried to introduce the new seeds into Europe in the early 1990s, the firm met stiff opposition. The move was viewed as a money grab by Monsanto — despite the fact that the GMOs also allow farmers to use less pesticides on plants — rather than a benefit to the food-rich European people. The most vocal opponents, particularly among Green Party activists, accused American agribusiness of trying to take over the European food supply.

Amid this anger, a political campaign to ban GMOs was launched with the underlying, if misleading, message that Europeans must be protected from poisons in their food. It worked. The myth that GMO foods are dangerous was firmly planted in the public psyche. Well-fed Europeans don't need GMO foods, but the rest of the world does. I have been intimately involved in the techniques of genetic modification as a scientist since GMOs were first conceived. In that time, hundreds of studies and tests have been done on GMO safety — and we've seen no scientific evidence that GMOs are inherently more dangerous than crops produced by traditional plant breeding.

After two decades of decrying GMO foods unsafe for Europeans, the Greens and their allies cannot now turn around and claim that biotech crops are safe for Africa. So they stick to this political ploy, spreading misinformation across the globe. For the sake of sick children and those who go to bed hungry, we must fight the self-serving, political arguments of the anti-GMO movement and ensure that the benefits of GMOs are available to all — perhaps even Europeans.

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