

## Do anti-GMO activists inhabit an information bubble? Ask Paul Krugman

A recent [post by](#) liberal economist and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, describes how critics of Obamacare stay misinformed, but not only because they have incorrect information; they also expose themselves to only “friendly” information sources which limit what is reported. There are parallels to the debate over GMOs.

... [T]here’s something I’ve noticed from the combination of reactions to what I write and researching past coverage of Obamacare. It goes like this: a lot of the untrue beliefs people have about Obamacare come not so much from outright false reporting as from selective reporting. Every suggestion of bad news gets highlighted — especially, of course, but not only by Fox, the WSJ, etc.. But when it turns out that the news wasn’t really that bad, these sources just move on. There are claims that millions of people are losing coverage — headlines! When it turns out not to be true — crickets! Some experts claim that premiums will rise by double digits — big news! Actual premium numbers come in and they’re surprisingly low — not mentioned.

The result is that most news consumers — who form impressions from media buzz rather than trying to work out details of an issue — have the sense that it’s been all bad news.

It seems an apt and parallel description to the asymmetry of information in the two discrete ecosystems of information around the GMO issue.

While anti-anti-GMO folks—those sympathetic to genetic engineering—tend to be aware of the information that the other side is looking at, that is rarely the case going in the other direction. Those critical of GMOs often seem to inhabit an insular information universe while the science community spends a great deal of time debunking the poorly conducted studies that are trumpeted and over-interpreted and twisted in SustainablePulse, GreenMedInfo, the Organic Consumer’s Association, NaturalNews, Food Democracy and various other GMO Free websites.

The folks who read those sites are often not even aware that an alternative ecosystem of information exists—science sites and even the mainstream press. They frequently don’t realize that the studies they are circulating have been roundly critiqued, if not completely discredited. They continue to circulate things like a [2009 editorial](#) by Scientific American that raised questions about the ability of independent researchers to access biotech seeds without realizing that the issue has long since been [resolved](#). They often continue to believe things like the urban myth that biotech crops employ the terminator technology.

Readers of RT.com—the Russian government influenced news site that regularly looks for news that embarrasses the United States—often believe that China is giving up on biotech crops, because it has rejected select shipments with crops they have yet to approve or that it has abandoned some research trials. The antis interpret this as evidence of some safety issue with biotech crops, rather than what it is: an attempt by China to manipulate trade policy and the fact that a particular research trial

has ended that didn't bear the results that had been hoped for.

And people who get all their news from anti-GMO sources rarely understand that there is [a lot of research on biotech safety](#), much of it by [independent sources](#).

Ironically, the mandatory labeling campaigns, launched by anti-GMOers with such high hopes, have so far ended in defeat precisely because they live in this hermetically sealed world. By bringing the GMO issue to the fore and debating the plusses and minutes of genetic engineering in all of its complexity, the ecosystem of misinformation is challenged, ruptured and exposed. It becomes harder every day for all but the most committed opponents of GMOs to stay sealed in their bubbles.

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