

## Do small farmers in developing countries want GM crops?

Do small farmers in developing countries want GM crops? That is a truly divisive question, and it seems like anyone with a dog in the hunt gets to speak for the farmers. I want to consider what's wrong with the many claims to represent the "farmer's voice."

There is a lively trade in constructing claims about what farmers hanker for. The claims are in peer-reviewed journals, in the media, and in reports and propaganda from pro- and anti-GMO parties. Like so much in the world of GMO's, they disagree sharply. In fact most are somewhere between meaningless and misleading.

Claims to represent the "farmer's voice" generally have two built-in biases.

First is **information bias**. If farmers have never seen or used a technology, then their opinion is basically a result of how you characterize it to them. The people doing the interviews know this, and they're hoping you don't think about it.

For instance, in 2001, with possible approval of India's first GM crop looming, a consortium of anti-GM groups convened a "citizens jury" in Andhra Pradesh. Aiming to give voice to "those people most affected" by visions of agricultural development, organizers selected a jury with heavy representation of poor farmers and showed videos they had made depicting three visions of the agricultural future. And guess what: the farmer jurors largely agreed with a statement expressing opposition to GM crops, including vitamin A rice and Bt cotton (Pimbert and Wakeford 2002).

On the other end of the spectrum we have a study by the biotech-booster outfit ISAAA. They constructed a voice for Philippine "farmer leaders" on Golden Rice by asking if they wanted to grow "a new 'yellow rice' that is fortified with vitamin A and that will be given free by the IRRI" to most farmers. Readers will be unsurprised that when it was put this way, most respondents answered this characterization of Golden Rice in the affirmative ([Chong 2003](#)).

The second problem with "farmers' voice" claims is **short term bias**. Adoption of agricultural technologies often leads to unforeseeable latent effects. They may be indirect, they may be much delayed, and they are sometimes disastrous. Most farmers voice claims are oddly oblivious to this fact, focusing instead on the present moment.

India is an example of how the impacts of technology can change dramatically after they are adopted by farmers. We've already noted that widespread adoption of Bt cotton (mainly between 2005-8). Bt cotton enthusiasts may see this as an open and shut case of giving the farmers what they want but it's also a case of fetishizing of short-term yield boosts and ignoring the bigger picture and longer term.

Here's why: the whole reason the farmers said yes to Bt cotton in the 2000s was the catastrophic agroecological fallout from their **yes** to the last round of farm technologies. What farmers said **yes** to was what was before their eyes, not to what lay down the road.

**Read the full, original blog:** [Do Farmers Want GM Crops?](#)