

## Dicamba-resistant crops aim to fight ‘superweeds’ but critics worry about environment

To counter a “superweed” epidemic plaguing farmers, agribusiness giant Monsanto is steadily moving forward on the introduction of its next major wave of genetically engineered crops.

But — citing environmental and sustainability concerns — critics argue that step forward is actually a substantial leap back.

Similar to bacteria that have adapted to frequently used antibiotics over time, super weeds have gained immunity to herbicides. Weed scientists estimate there are more than 400 different herbicide-resistant weeds around the world. Resistant weeds hurt crops by competing for sunlight and nutrients.

St. Louis-based [Monsanto’s biotechnology team has been working on two new soybean and cotton varieties](#) designed to withstand dicamba — an infrequently used herbicide that weeds have not caught up with yet — for nearly a decade.

“These new technologies will help farmers achieve better harvests, which will help meet the demand to nourish the growing population,” said Miriam Paris, Monsanto’s Xtend system launch manager.

Critics worry it will prompt a greater dependence on the toxic chemicals that caused the super weed problem in the first place.

“In the medium to longer run, commercializing these crops without any real mandatory controls on how they’re used is going to lead to a lot of environmental and potentially human health problems,” said Gurian-Sherman, a senior scientist and director of the sustainable agriculture program for the Center for Food Safety. “They are going to just exacerbate what we’re already seeing.”

The varieties were fully deregulated by the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service on January 15. The FDA has already supported deregulation. The EPA will finalize its assessment later this year.

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