

Why public consensus on GMOs is difficult

As a lover of food, I like many of you have some opinions on genetically modified organisms or GMOs in our food supply. Are they a good thing? Is their safety still in question? As I see it, there are a couple problems with GMOs that will make it hard for Americans and others throughout the world come to a consensus on the issue.

First and foremost, there is the problem of **imprecise language**. Genetic (genes, chromosomes, DNA). Modification (to change). When two parents come together, half of the chromosomes are transferred to the offspring from the female and half from the male. This means that the offspring has been changed. It is [genetically](#) different from either the mother or the father. Throughout history this has happened millions of times in natural settings. But when we hear the term GMO, we are usually talking about *genetic engineering* or when humans control what genes are transferred and exhibited in the resulting offspring. Genetic engineering typically happens in a controlled environment. Specific genes that have been studied and have known benefits are targeted.

Secondly, in the USDA classification of [Organic](#), GMOs were tacked on kind of like a rider on a congressional bill. The USDA guidelines for organic crops certify that genetically modified organisms were not used. What the USDA Organic certification has done is **lumped together two very different conversations** – pesticide usage and GMOs. This unfortunately pits two groups against each other and polarizes a battle that maybe should not be a fight at all. There is a place for organics in the marketplace and there are benefits to GMO crops. Why can't we have both?

Where do we go from here? Let's start by talking about genetic engineering rather than GMOs and clearly define the issues at hand. Let's separate the idea of GMOs from the idea of Organic. Let's stop the spiral of silence. Let's keep our healthy skepticism AND approach each issue with an open mind. Are you up for the challenge?

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