

He said/She said on GMOs: Mark Lynas v Claire Robinson

This week *The Independent* has been investigating the future of genetically modified food – nearly 20 years since the first GM crops were planted.

To round the series off we asked one pro and one anti GM campaigner to go head to head on the issues in an email exchange to help readers make up their own minds. Claire Robinson of GMWatch and Mark Lynas, an author and proponent of GM technology, took up the challenge

Dear Claire,

The good thing about science is that it can make you change your mind. Ideologies hate to shift, but the scientific method's ability to marshal facts and empirical data to challenge existing beliefs is crucial – and always has been, from Copernicus to Darwin. The problems come, I think, when people refuse to accept overwhelming scientific evidence on an issue, for whatever reason, and instead cling to unscientific or even anti-scientific beliefs.

I was on your side 15 years ago, opposing GM crops, when there was little evidence of their safety and the precautionary principle seemed apt. But since then sufficient published data has accumulated (now totaling hundreds of peer-reviewed papers) that there is now an overwhelming scientific consensus on the safety of GM technology.

Best wishes,

Mark

Dear Mark

I agree it's vital to make judgments about the safety of GM crops based on empirical evidence. That's why I got together with two genetic engineers to publish a compilation of peer-reviewed studies and other well documented evidence showing that GM crops have not been proven safe to eat or for the environment and that some GMOs have been shown to be unsafe (GMO Myths and Truths, available free from earthopensource.org).

We are not alone in our view. This year a statement signed by over 300 scientists and researchers titled, "No scientific consensus on GMO safety", was published in a peer-reviewed journal. The authors analysed peer-reviewed studies and concluded that the claimed consensus on GMO safety is an "artificial construct that has been falsely perpetuated".

Many scientific organisations [have issued statements](#) that cast doubt on GMO safety and/or say that the jury is still out. Even the statement by the American Association for the Advancement of Science board of directors that you cite was condemned by 21 dissenting scientists, including members of the AAAS, as "[an Orwellian argument](#)". The scientists warned that the herbicides with which GMOs are grown "may

induce detrimental health effects even at low exposure levels”.

Yours,

Claire

Read full, original article: [The GM crops debate: Campaigners for and against go head-to-head](#)