GM mosquitoes that could reduce illness in Florida Keys face public opposition

A U.K.-based company, Oxitec, has altered two genes in the Aedes aegypti mosquito so that when modified males breed with wild females, the offspring inherit a lethal gene and die in the larval stage. The state agency that controls mosquitos in the Florida Keys is awaiting approval from the federal government of a trial release of Oxitec's genetically modified mosquitos to prevent a recurrence of a dengue fever outbreak. But some people in the Keys and elsewhere are up in arms, with more than 155,000 signing a petition opposing the trial of genetically engineered mosquitoes in a small area of 400 households next to Key West.

Many scientists say, however, that genetically modifying the Aedesmosquito — and possibly other types of mosquitoes carrying diseases such as malaria — is a more effective and environmentally benign way of controlling mosquito-borne illnesses than spraying pesticides and other measures. Oxitec's genetically engineered Aedes aegyptihas proven itself in other countries, successfully reducing populations of the insect by up to 90 percent in field trials in the Cayman Islands, Brazil, Malaysia, and Panama. Overall, the trials were so successful that Brazil approved the use of the GM mosquitoes last year.

"Some people don't want to see GE (genetically engineered) anything," says entomologist Raymond St. Leger, distinguished university professor at the University of Maryland. "It's an emotional response. It's hard to reason people out of a decision they didn't reason themselves into."

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: Genetically Modified Mosquito Sparks a Controversy in Florida