

Organic seed development lags biotech in developing pest controlling varieties

Rearranging veggie genes is big business, and we're not even talking about biotechnology. Private companies and university researchers spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year breeding better genetic varieties of food crops.

But organic farmers say those programs have a big blind spot when it comes to figuring out which new varieties are truly better. Few companies or researchers test those varieties under organic conditions.

For an organic farmer, the ideal bean variety would be one that's capable of fending for itself in a hostile environment. Perhaps it starts growing quickly enough to get a head start on the weeds, or finds a way to fend off insect pests, or develops a bigger root system to extract nutrients from the soil.

None of those genetic traits, though, would allow it to shine in a typical test plot where weeds are controlled with herbicides, nutrients come from synthetic fertilizer, and farmers fight off insects with standard insecticides.

In the future, says [Bill Tracy](#), who breeds new versions of sweet corn, he's hoping to create sweet corn varieties that are less prone to infestation by insects such as the corn ear worm. Biotech companies have created genetically engineered versions of corn with powerful insect resistance, but organic farmers have rejected the use of GMOs. Tracy hopes to find natural genetic resistance to insects in varieties of corn that grow in tropical regions, and introduce those genetic traits, through cross-pollination, into sweet corn varieties that American consumers like to eat. "Flavor is most important," he says.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [Do Organic Farmers Need Special Seeds And Money To Breed Them?](#)