

How one farmer uses GMO corn to reduce pesticides, increase sustainability

In a wide, brown field, Bret Davis opens a pocketknife with a click, kneels down and scrapes through a furrow of dirt. He uncovers a purple corn seed. He measures about six inches to his right, scrapes the dirt again and reveals a green seed.

Their appearance in the field is not a prank nor evidence of some agricultural disease. The corn's identity resides in those colors.

Green means the corn is a genetically modified organism, often referred to as a GMO, and carries traits that repel insects and protect it from the herbicide RoundUp.

The purple ones, just 5 percent of the planted seeds, are fodder for the insects, a way of keeping pests from developing immunity to the green corn's ability to kill them.

"It's made raising a healthy crop easier," said Davis, who farms 3,600 acres of corn and soybeans in Delaware County. "We can do it non-GMO, but we'd need more pesticide and labor. (GMOs) make it a lot easier on the farmer.

He believes GMOs make his farm more sustainable and profitable and his crops safer for consumers and farmers. Since he's used them, he said, he no longer has to blanket his cornfields indiscriminately with insecticide.

"(GMOs) are no more silver bullets than pesticides were," said Margaret Smith, professor of plant breeding and genetics at Cornell University

Root worms and other pests, plus some weeds, have adapted to the technology. "If you keep hitting pests with the same hammer, (they) will evolve to overcome it," she said.

Davis knows that. He's betting the purple refuge seeds will give bugs another wrinkle to figure out. "Nothing's perfect," he said.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: Genetically modified seeds are changing agriculture