GMO crops benefit small vegetable farms as well as large industrial farms

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Novel seed genetics—particularly GM varieties—have altered the way farming, and rural America, operates.

Genetically modified (GM) crops have been rapidly adopted by the American farmer. This technology carries substantial cost savings for the grower. Adoption of herbicide-resistant crops, as well as stacked varieties, has been shown to reduce farm labor per acre.

As the son of a farmer, I have access to the land, machinery, and experience required to maintain a profitable farm, but entering this industry is more challenging for folks without direct connections. Costly machinery and even more expensive land prices have forced many young farmers out of the market.

However, new niche agricultural markets and growing techniques for small farms are emerging across the United States. Organic farming has steadily increased across the country.

Small vegetable farms also provide another avenue of entry for novice farmers. Even without organic certification, the smallest fruit and vegetable farms enjoy some of the highest revenue per managed acre. Small farms benefit from increased crop density and agricultural intensity, as well as the fact that GM niche crops of lower yield can carry unique benefits. GM apples suppress fruit browning; GM melons and tomatoes allow controlled fruit ripening; and GM potatoes halt both insects and leaf wilt. These varieties can fill niches in the small farmer's operation where traditionally-bred varieties fail.

Technology continues to shape the lives of those that pursue farming as a career. Genetically modified crops are just one tool in a growing arsenal that allows farmers to maximize yields in both row-crop and vegetable agriculture.

Editor's Note: This post is part of a series on GMOs in a special edition of the online magazine "Signal to Noise", produced by Science in the News. You can read the entire series here: Signal to Noise Special Edition: GMOs and Our Food

Read full, original post: GMOs in My Lifetime: How Genetically Modified Crops Have Transformed Rural America