

Fear of rogue organism, global catastrophe drives anti-GMO hysteria

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Are GMOs just too risky to mess with? For about a year, I've been mulling [a paper](#) that says they are. The paper is worth examining because it helps explain a rational fear at the base of a lot of the opposition to GMOs.

The authors make the case that the fear of GMOs leading to global ruin isn't crazy. It is a rational fear.

Lurking in the background of the GMO debate is a fear that genetic engineering will create a rogue organism that will destroy the world. Experts tend to dismiss this concern. Instead they should acknowledge that this is a rational assessment of risk. It's just that this risk isn't unique; it's a basic fact of our daily lives, with or without gene-modification technology.

Human risk assessment is quirky. We are acutely sensitive to the potential for new risks, but numbed to everyday risks. When we hear about the risks of some new technology, the potential for ruin looms large. Experts try to mollify our fears by saying, "Hey, don't worry, the chances are low." The layman quite rationally responds, "I don't care if the chances are *low*, I don't want to take *any* chances!"

At that point, communication breaks down. But perhaps the conversation might advance if the experts conceded that genetic engineering really does contain the risk of ruin, and then helped lay people see that every other option, including the status quo, should evoke the same fear.

If we are able to see the risks of the status quo, the GMO issue stops looking like potential ruin. Instead, all of agriculture begins to look like a series of choices between various types of potentially ruinous technology.

Read full, original post: [Dealing with the rational fear about GMOs and global catastrophe](#)