

## Glyphosate: Real risks, benefits of poster child for GMO debate

**PHThe GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.**

It's hard to talk soberly about glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup. Glyphosate is entwined in GMOs, and the debate is commensurately heated. It amped up earlier this year when the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), declared glyphosate a probable human carcinogen.

The IARC is charged with identifying substances that can cause cancer, but not the levels of exposure that are risky. Although glyphosate is a probable carcinogen, alcohol consumption, according to the IARC, is a definite carcinogen. So is leather dust. The question is whether we're exposed to enough to put us at risk.

Keith Solomon, an environmental toxicologist who has studied glyphosate, points out that if the herbicide is a carcinogen, "it has to be a very potent one to pose a risk, because the exposure that humans have is relatively small."

What glyphosate does to humans isn't the only issue, of course. There's also what it does to the environment, and there have been both good and bad consequences of herbicide-tolerant crops.

One positive is that herbicide tolerance has enabled farmers to reduce tillage, traditionally used to uproot and kill weeds. Because tilling disturbs the soil, it facilitates erosion and runoff of nutrients and chemicals.

One negative is that herbicide tolerance has hastened the development of glyphosate-resistant weeds, the most destructive consequence of which is consumer hostility in a conversation about GMOs that is dominated by that trait.

The problems with herbicide tolerance aren't problems with genetic modification — after all, there's plenty of non-GM herbicide tolerance. We have a baby here, and we have bathwater. We have to learn to tell the difference.

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