

GMO technology that saved Montana's sugar beets now tarnishing their reputation

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Montana's sugar beet industry faces a serious challenge in public perception regarding the healthfulness of its product.

The sugar beet business would most likely not even be alive, today, in Yellowstone County, if it were not for the development of "Round-up" resistant beets, but anti-GMO public sentiment against that same technology now threatens the industry, according to Randal Jobman, Northern Agricultural manager for Western Sugar in Billings.

Prior to the introduction of Roundup resistant beets, the industry was in peril, said Jobman. With up and down years in terms of production, and with production costs running \$1000 per acre, the future looked bleak. Much of that cost involved herbicide application, weeds that would have quickly succumbed to the chemical glyphosate, which is the ingredient in the commonly known brand name, Roundup. But glyphosate killed most sugar beet plants as well – but not all of them.

Then scientists were able to identify the gene in the stronger beet plants that enabled them to resist the glyphosate and were able to insert that gene into plants that lacked it. The results have been profound for the industry. "We are produced from the GMO process, but it is GMO free."

"GMO beets have been around for thousands of years. We just learned how to replicate it," said Jobman.

And the glyphosate resistant beets benefit the environment, according to Jobman. "We are applying five times less chemicals than we did before." The amount of fuel needed and wear and tear on equipment – all are reduced. There is nothing wrong with non-GMO food products, said Jobman, "It's just not better, and to spend more money on it is unwarranted."

Read full, original post: [Sugar Beet Industry Faces New GMO Challenge](#)