

Can GM mosquitoes move past public's fear of gene editing and play role in eliminating Zika?

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

History is filthy with stories of pest control gone terribly, terribly wrong.

Consider, for example, the infamous tale of how the mongoose got to the Hawaiian Islands. The sleek carnivore was imported in the 1880s as part of a plan by the sugar industry to subdue the rats that wouldn't stop gnawing through stalks of sugar cane. But there was a problem: Rats are active at night, while mongoose are active during the day. So instead, the mongoose came to Hawaii and feasted on native birds and their eggs.

Today, scientists don't need mongoose for pest control. In some cases, they can just tweak the genes of the animal or insect they're trying to vanquish. There's good evidence to support the idea that genetic modification of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, for example, could help dramatically reduce its population.

But the question of genetic modification remains fraught—in part because of legitimate scientific concerns, but largely because of misinformation and cultural resistance to genetic modification more broadly. [A poll](#) conducted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found more than one-third of Americans believed genetically modified mosquitoes were to blame for the spread of Zika. (They're not.) Others believe that just because something is natural, it is somehow better.

"The public fears genetic engineering. Nearly all politicians don't understand it," said Arthur Caplan, the founding director of the Division of Medical Ethics at NYU School of Medicine. "I don't think the issue is economic. It is ignorance, distrust, fear of the unknown, fear of prior efforts to use biology to combat pests which went sour."

Read full, original post: [Genetically Modified Mosquitoes: What Could Possibly Go Wrong?](#)