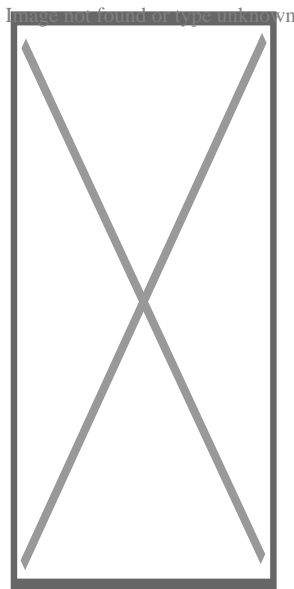


2016 Presidential Race: Clinton, Trump, Stein, and Johnson on Food, Farming and GMOs

As part of a multi-part Genetic Literacy Project series on the candidates' view on genetics and biotechnology—in medicine and agriculture. In this article, we examine how Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Libertarian Gary Johnson and the Green Party's Jill Stein address issues on food, farming, and crop genetic modification.

[AGDAILY, using editorial material supplied by the GLP, has designed a graphic—[viewable here](#)—that highlights each of the candidates' key public pronouncements on farming and corp biotechnology. It's reproduced below]



The Presidential Candidates on Crop Biotechnology, Food, and Farming. Please click for larger image. The full graphic is also posted at bottom of piece.

Hillary Clinton has issued numerous [policy statements on food and farming issues](#) and a rural farm policy. Donald Trump has assembled a 'board of agricultural advisors' but has issued few comprehensive policy statements other than to endorse free market and income security for farmers. The other two major

candidates have issued even fewer statements.

Hillary Clinton: Supports agricultural biotechnology and precision farming

The former Secretary of State has also spoken of the power and value of genetic modification to confront problems in developing countries, such as hunger and malnutrition. Clinton at the [2014 Biotechnology Industry Organization](#) (BIO) convention:



I stand in favor of using seeds and products that have a proven track record. There is a big what the perceptions are.

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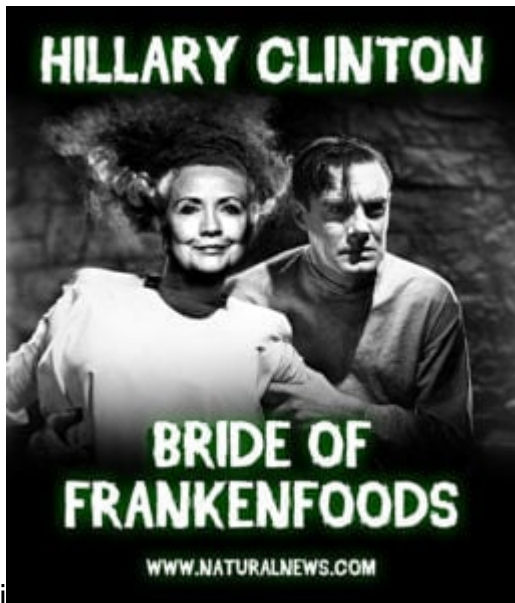
Clinton has also visited plant nurseries to educate herself on

modern agricultural practices and biotechnology, although she has not spoken out specifically about GMOs or unqualifiedly endorsed their implementation.

Clinton says agriculture industry should consider a public relations [makeover](#) to better promote GMOs:

Genetically modified sounds 'Frankensteinish'; drought-resistant sounds really something you want. So how do you create a different vocabulary to talk about what it is you're trying to help people do? And that I would urge the association and companies working in this area to try to be more thoughtful about so that you don't raise that red flag immediately.

Even this modest support for precision agriculture, biotechnology and evidence-based farming and food policy has not gone over well with more radical elements in the Democratic party. During the primary season, she was attacked by liberal voters and Bernie Sander supporters for her alleged [ties to Monsanto](#)



, Bi g Ag and corporate interests. Anti-GMO activists often refer to her

as the “Bride of Frankenfood” because of her support of crop biotechnology.

Current USDA secretary [Tom Vilsack](#) is Clinton’s top agriculture advisor, indicating she is likely to continue with many of the Obama Administration’s food and farm policies. During his tenure, the USDA has invested in [growing organic agriculture](#). Her platform outlines a “plan for a vibrant rural America”, which includes “build[ing] a strong local and regional food system by doubling funding for the Farmers Market Promotion Program and the Local Food Promotion Program to expand food hubs, farmers markets...and to encourage direct sales to local schools, hospitals, retailers and wholesalers.”

In the Science Debate, Clinton wrote:

The affordability of our food, the independence and sophistication of our energy supply, and the strength of our small communities all depend on a vibrant rural America. As president, my administration will do more to support family farms by doubling funding for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development program; building strong and sustainable local food systems; and providing a focused safety net by continuing to make progress in targeting federal resources in commodity payment, crop insurance, and disaster assistance programs to support family operations.

Clinton has wavered and flip flopped regarding the issue of mandatory labeling of so-called GMOs. Before the campaign launched in earnest, Clinton opposed mandatory labeling on the grounds that there's no plausible hypothesis as to why crops altered transgenically should be any more risky than crops altered via older techniques, including methods that humans have been using for thousands of years. She has said that a "GMO" label could stigmatize the science—a genetically-literate perspective that is shared among almost all mainstream scientists, but an unpopular one among many politicians, particularly in the Democratic party, whose anti-corporate ideological views have prompted most to take a vocal anti-GMO and pro-labeling stance.

According to a recent wave of emails from Clinton's campaign chief John Podesta released by Wikileaks, pro-labeling advocates led by Stonyfield Organic and Just Label It founder [Gary Hirshberg](#) [[Read GLP profile](#)][—](#)known as a Democratic Party fund-raising "bundler"—began to lobby fiercely for her to move toward their anti-GMO position. That effort initially appeared to fail. She told a [town hall meeting](#) in Fairfield, Iowa last December that consumers have the right to know if they are eating GMOs and that more independent scientific evaluation of them is needed. But at the same meeting she appeared to endorse GMOs, saying: "there are a lot of advocates who fight hunger in Africa who are desperate for GMO seeds, because they are drought resistant and they don't know how else they're going to get enough yield to feed people."

According to Podesta email's Hirshberg appeared to be furious. "I have raised nearly \$400K for her because I believed what she told me. [Hirshberg appears to be referring to a quid pro quo deal he may have struck with Clinton to flip her pro-science position.] If that is not the case, I'd like the chance to speak to her."

Hirshberg's contributions worked. In March, in the heat of her battle with labeling advocate Bernie Sanders, Clinton muddled her position even more, tweeting her support for a state-by-state labeling system and against a federal pre-emption standard, which was later passed by both houses of Congress.

[screen-shot-2016-10-13-at-8-45-49-pm](#)

After the tweet appeared, Jake Sullivan, Clinton's top foreign policy advisor sent Clinton a message: "Thanks Gary! It was thanks to your initial emails on this that we got the machinery in action and produced this tweet."

Jill Stein: Anti-corporate ideologue

The Green Party has no food or farming policy and its nominee, Jill Stein, has not outlined her positions in this sector other than to [state](#): "GMOs are not good for the planet. They are not good for the people" and to appear at anti-crop biotechnology rallies, such as [this 2015 March Against Monsanto](#) in Miami. [screen-shot-2016-09-26-at-4-56-10-pm](#)

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All of her positions appear to flow from her ideological belief that corporations are inherently evil. Stein's [website](#) describes the mandatory GMO labeling campaign as part of an effort to "Rein in Monsanto". She cites cherry picked, flawed studies in order to question the safety of products that have been part of the food supply for years. She places her anti-GMO positions under the category of "Protecting Mother Earth."

On [ScienceDebate](#), her position of agricultural technology consists of single bullet point: "Label GMOs, and put a moratorium on GMOs and pesticides until they are proven safe." Would such a moratorium include pesticides that organic farmers are permitted to use? Would it include natural insecticides, such as Bt, used by both organic and conventional farmers?

In the Science Debate, Stein repasted her GMO position as part of her response to a different issue: how the candidates would protect biodiversity, but with one slight difference. Whereas about food she proposed a moratorium on GMOs (and mandatory labeling for the banned products), in the biodiversity answer, she wrote that the moratorium would be for *new* GMOs.

Stein has an unwavering anti-conventional farming and anti-GM ideology that mirrors the Green Party's

views. Her ideology suggests she would support policies hostile to the mainstream food and agricultural biotech industries—and probably even to independent academic researchers in this field.

Gary Johnson: Bucks Libertarian ideology to support GMO labeling on personal grounds

The Libertarian candidate favors GMO labeling, which would seem to be contrary to libertarian philosophy of limiting federally imposed laws. He told [Rolling Stone Magazine](#) that his views on this subject are not driven by his ideology or science, but by his personal experience:

I have celiac disease, so I need food labeled. I think food should be labeled, and that would include GMOs in food.

There is no relationship between celiac disease and genetic modification, which is a process and not a product. Labeling a food with transgenic corn, soy, canola or sugar cane would not help someone with celiac disease know whether gluten is present.

John Mackey, the libertarian CEO of the Whole Foods Market, which is openly hostile to GM technology, has given Johnson his full-fledged [endorsement](#). Whole Foods Market is [15 billion-dollar Fortune 500 corporation](#), whose sales of high-priced organic food depends on part on promoting non-GMO products. Both Mackey and Johnson eschew many government regulations except apparently on this issue. The unscientific conflation of gluten and GMOs has raised eyebrows among scientists and leaves uncertainty surrounding how a Johnson administration would actually approach science-based food issues.

Donald Trump: Supports GMOs, against labeling, for mainstream agricultural policy, also backed failed pseudoscience supplements business

Donald Trump may be a wildcard on food and crop biotechnology issues. When asked by the Iowa Farm Bureau whether he supports “the use of biotechnology in food products and oppose efforts to require mandatory labeling for foods simply because they contain ingredients derived from biotechnology,” [he replied simply](#), “Yes.”

His platform website is bereft of any food or agricultural or food policy statements. As with so many other issues—his comments are all over the place on food related issues. Appearing on the Dr. Oz Show, for example, the businessman [addressed the issue of the causes of and solutions for childhood obesity](#):

That is a school thing to a certain extent. I guess you could say it's a hereditary thing, too. I would imagine it certainly is a hereditary thing. But a lot of schools aren't providing proper food because they have budget problems, and they're buying cheaper food and not as good of food. And the big thing—when I went to school I always loved sports, and I would always—I loved to eat and I loved sports, and it worked, because I could do both. A lot of schools today, they don't have sports programs, and that is a big problem. I would try and open that up. I'm a big believer in the whole world of sports. I would try and open that up.

Considering the anti-central government tilt of the Republican Party on health and education matters, it's unlikely that Trump favors a national solution to prompt schools to serve healthier food, hire more physical education teachers, provide more after-school physical activity, and more health/nutrition education. He would likely encourage governors to take action on a state-by-state basis if he/she thought it was warranted.


Trump has released a [list of 65 food and farming advisors](#), almost all Republican Party stalwarts or wealthy food and farming executives who have donated to his campaign. He is publicly committed to trying to [eliminate the EPA](#), so it's unlikely he will support tighter restrictions on agricultural chemicals. On Science Debate, he outlined his market-based approach to farm policy.

The implication of your question is that there should be central control of American agriculture by the federal government. That is totally inappropriate. The agriculture industry should be free to seek its best solutions through the market system. That said, the production of food is a national security issue and should receive the attention of the federal government when it comes to providing security for our farmers and ranchers against losses to nature.


Unlike any of the other candidates, Trump has taken a pot shot at 'evil Monsanto'. Here is a retweet he posted (then took down) last year after one of his opponents, Ben Carson, took an lead in an early poll in Iowa.



Donald J. Trump ✓
@realDonaldTrump

 Segui

"@mygreenhippo #BenCarson is now leading in the #polls in #Iowa. Too much #Monsanto in the #corn creates issues in the brain? #Trump #GOP"

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Trump has dipped his toe into the anti-science supplement and alternative health industries led by Adams and other devious natural health proponents, such as Joseph Mercola. In 2009, he [launched a supplements company](#), with a typical Trumpism:

We're gonna come out with new and different products. They're gonna be wonderful products.

The Trump gimmick was this: You send in a urine sample—and a big, fat check—and you're sent a supplement formulation customized for your physiology—and within months your health will be, well, *amazing*. Well, the health of the company wasn't so amazing; Trump's company went bust.

The Presidential Candidates — & — Crop Biotechnology

"I stand in favor of using seeds and products that have a proven track record. There is a big gap between what the facts are, and what the perceptions are."

Hillary Clinton *Democratic Party Nominee*

Backer of biotechnology and precision farming

- Expected to continue with many of the Obama administration's food and farm policies
- Has spoken of the value of genetic modification to confront hunger and malnutrition in developing countries
- Support of crop biotechnology has earned her the moniker "Bride of Frankenfood" by critics
- Initially opposed mandatory labeling but then supported a state-by-state labeling system while still against a federal pre-emption standard (which was passed by both houses of Congress)



"The implication [by some] ... is that there should be central control of American agriculture by the federal government. That is totally inappropriate. The agriculture industry should be free to seek its best solutions through the market system."

Donald Trump *Republican Party Nominee*

A wildcard on food and food biotechnology issues

- Has selected 65 food and farming advisors, most of whom are Republican Party stalwarts or executives who have donated to his campaign
- Wants to eliminate the EPA, making it unlikely that there would be tighter restrictions on agricultural chemicals
- When asked by the Iowa Farm Bureau whether he supports "the use of biotechnology in food products and oppose efforts to require mandatory labeling for foods simply because they contain ingredients derived from biotechnology," he replied simply, "Yes."



"GMOs are not good for the planet. They are not good for the people."

Jill Stein *Green Party Nominee*

Anti-corporate advocate who favors organic farming

- Wants to put a moratorium on GMOs and pesticides until, in her words, "they are proven safe."
- Has an unwavering anti-conventional farming and anti-GM ideology
- Green Party has no specific food or farming policy



"I have celiac disease, so I need food labeled. I think food should be labeled, and that would include GMOs in food."

Gary Johnson *Libertarian Party Nominee*

Bucks party ideology to support GMO labeling

- Favors GMO labeling, which is contrary to Libertarian philosophy
- Claims celiac disease leads him to push for more food labels, despite the fact that there is no relationship between celiac disease and genetic modification



David Warmflash is an astrobiologist, physician and science writer. Follow [@CosmicEvolution](#) to read what he is saying on Twitter.