

## GMOs 101: Experts break down the basics of crop biotechnology

An online search for “GMO” returns more than 88 million results — a tangled mess of frightening images, dense data, skepticism, insulting comments and conflicting claims and counterclaims. For the average consumer, separating reputable sources from propaganda is tough, if not impossible.

What is a genetically modified organism, or GMO? Even the answer to the question can be controversial.

At its most basic, genetic modification is the process by which changes occur in an organism’s genome. Nature is perpetually modifying the genetics of every organism in an effort to help the organism adapt to its changing environment.

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The most debated topic related to GMOs is whether they threaten the health of humans or the environment .... Researchers like [Rebecca Grumet](#), a professor in the [Michigan State University] [Department of Horticulture](#), point out that safety questions also can arise with conventional breeding, since plants make toxic substances on their own.

“Modification through genetic engineering is not unsafe simply because it’s genetic engineering,” says Grumet. “In terms of alterations to a plant’s genome, what’s important is not the method that was used.

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