

Podcast with Dr. Paul Offit: Striking similarities between anti-biotech and anti-vaccine activism

In the late 1990s, after the first transgenic crops hit the market, critics of biotechnology [argued that](#) we didn't know how "GMOs" affect human health. Nonetheless, the critics said, "Big Ag" managed to sneak these experimental crops into our food supply.

Twenty years and over [1,000 studies later](#), the argument hasn't changed. "What impact do GM foods have on our health? The answer is, no one really knows," the pro-organic group [Just Label It](#) claims. Gary Ruskin, co-director of the anti-GMO outfit U.S. Right to Know, says this is because "[s]cience is for sale. Powerful corporations can have a powerful effect on what is known and what is not known. That appears especially true for the agrichemical industry."

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These claims are [of course false](#), but they bear a striking resemblance to the arguments made by anti-vaccine activists. The only difference is that vaccine skeptics aim their anger at the pharmaceutical industry, which has allegedly failed to show that vaccines are safe. This similarity between the two movements hasn't escaped the attention of the scientific community. As science writer Mark Lynas [noted in November 2017](#),

It is too early to claim that the anti-vaccine and anti-GMO movements are fully merging, but there seems little doubt that the circles of followers in their Venn diagrams driven by similar conspiracist fears about big corporations, ideological preference for 'natural' alternatives and opposition to modern science generally are increasingly overlapping.

The question worth asking, then, is why do these activist movements share so much in common? Dr. Paul Offit joins me to discuss the similarity between anti-biotech and anti-vaccine activism, and how the fear-based messaging central to both movements impacts the public's understanding of science.

Paul Offit is a pediatrician at the [Children's Hospital of Philadelphia](#) and an expert on vaccines, immunology, and virology. He has written 10 popular books and more than 160 papers in medical and scientific journals in the areas of rotavirus-specific immune responses and vaccine safety.

Cameron J. English is the GLP's senior agricultural genetics and special projects editor. He is a science writer and podcast host. [BIO](#). Follow him on Twitter [@camjenglish](#)