

Podcast: Biologist Rob Wager takes on anti-GMO scientists at 1st International Conference on Agroecology

Economic growth fueled by [market reforms](#) has cut poverty in the developing world drastically over the last 30 years. But approximately 400 million people in sub-Saharan Africa still live on [less than \\$2](#) a day, the majority of whom work in agriculture. Sadly, these farmers and their families are often denied access to crop technologies—developed by African scientists and financed with public funds—that could help them escape grinding poverty.

In the mid 1990s, western anti-GMO groups launched a well-coordinated assault on crop biotechnology that resulted in an effective ban on GMO crop cultivation in Europe. European farmers and consumers suffered as a result, but so did their counterparts in Africa, whose governments viewed Europe's opposition to farming innovation as justification enough to prohibit crop biotechnology in their countries.

capture
Rob Wager

In June 2019, several of the organizations and activists involved in this anti-biotech campaign hosted a conference on Agroecology in Nairobi, Kenya. Participants gathered, [the organizers announced](#), “to discuss the potential of agroecology ([organic farming](#)) to transform food and agriculture systems.”

However, a significant portion of the conference was dedicated to denigrating biotechnology and agricultural chemistry. Among the speakers were several key figures of the anti-GMO movement—most notably Tyrone Hayes, infamous [for claiming](#) that the herbicide atrazine turns male frogs into females, and Gilles-Eric Seralini, author of the infamous, [retracted study](#) alleging that glyphosate-tolerant corn causes cancer. Both were given platforms to offer their long-debunked arguments to a diverse audience of farmers, students and politicians.

But one scientist on the scene was having none of this. Traveling at his own expense, biologist [Rob Wager](#), faculty member at Vancouver Island University in Canada, attended the conference and offered local media and other attendees a scientific counter to the disinformation onslaught meant to skew public opinion away from potentially life-saving technologies. On this episode of Talking Biotech, Wager joins University of Florida plant geneticist Kevin Folta to recap his experience and analyze the arguments of the anti-biotech speakers at the conference.

<https://geneticliteracyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/194-wager.mp3>

Robert Wager has been a faculty member of the biology department at Vancouver Island University for 24 years. He specializes in public outreach on Genetically Engineered crops and derived foods. Follow him on Twitter [@RobertWager1](#) and [his website](#)

Kevin M. Folta is a professor in the Horticultural Sciences Department at the University of Florida. Follow professor Folta on Twitter [@kevinfolta](#) and email your questions to kfolta@ufl.edu

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