

Viewpoint: Generation Z to environmentalists: If you care about sustainability, embrace GMOs and gene edited crops

Many people are naturally skeptical of genetically modified foods—including many in the environmental movement. I understand why, for as long as human civilization has existed, food has been seen as something that comes off a field or from a farm—not out of a laboratory. In many ways, genetic modification is indeed unnatural and counterintuitive—but why must this be a bad thing?

Within the environmental movement, this debate presents an interesting contradiction. On the one hand, the new green movement is adamant that wholesale lifestyle changes are necessary to combat climate change, including moving away from animal-based diets and potentially even banning meat.

On the other hand, however, those very same people adhere to quixotic notions of ‘natural’ and ‘pure’ agriculture, despite the overwhelmingly positive environmental outcomes associated with more technological forms of food creation. Environmentalists often oppose the innovative farming and food techniques that science has to offer, with [Greenpeace](#) being a leading critic, yet ignore the reasons why their very movement should be the ones embracing such genetic technology.

action and flora type unknown
Image: Greenpeace

Indeed, [study](#) after [study](#) indicates that genetically modified foods, from crops to lab meat, could be instrumental in reducing water usage, curbing food-related emissions, saving animal lives, and freeing up land (for enhanced natural landscapes, for example). The use of biotechnology to this end enjoys the [support of thousands of scientists](#), including 150 Nobel laureates, who all realize that innovation and progress are the way forward, rather than regressive idealism.

Ultimately, it is undeniable that both the animal industry and agriculture more generally have significant environmental impacts. But the answer to this is not to stifle innovation or espouse idealistic notions of ‘natural’ food production—it is to embrace biotechnology as a means to not only sustain and feed millions of people more effectively, but also to overcome many of the environmental problems associated with intensive agriculture and animal-related emissions.

But this message faces an uphill battle. With heavyweight organizations such as Greenpeace opposing [GMOs](#), it is more likely that we will see draconian methods such as banning meat being pushed than innovation-friendly technological solutions. Yet, young people can play a crucial role in shifting this narrative. [Recent research](#) shows that Gen Z (those born between 1995 and 2000) are by far the most likely to support food tech, at a rate of approximately 70%, whilst millennials and boomers are lagging behind. The research indicates that young people are well placed to change the public narrative surrounding food technology, and creating a society more accommodating of gene editing techniques such as CRISPR and innovations such as lab meat.

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other ‘disruptive’

innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

[SIGN UP](#)

For those of us who care about the environment, this is crucial. Organizations such as the [American Conservation Coalition](#) and [British Conservation Alliance](#), both run exclusively by young people, are leading the charge on market-based, innovation-friendly environmental advocacy. This extends to food tech, and the need to reduce regulatory barriers around the world that inhibit pro-growth, environmentally friendly technological solutions to big problems such as food-related carbon emissions.

We understand that innovation is the best prescription, and that we must support technology in the face of a green movement intent on regressive and draconian solutions that are ultimately counterproductive. Part of this is appealing to the green movement that [GMOs](#) are our allies in fighting climate change, not our enemies. And if they really care about the environment, this is one of the best ways to demonstrate that. As young people, we are literally fighting for our future.

Ultimately, it is important that this new generation follow the facts, not just rigid environmental orthodoxy. Much more must be done to change the general environmental narrative, and genetic literacy is one of those crucial battlegrounds. Young people must lead the fight on food technology.

Chris Barnard is the President & Founder of the British Conservation Alliance, a student-led organization committed to promoting market-based solutions to environmental problems. Follow him on Twitter [@ChrisBarnardDL](#) and the alliance on Twitter [@BCA_eco](#)