Some Florida Key residents incensed about pending release of Zika- and malaria-stopping GMO mosquitoes, but others believe cutting-edge science will help control health menace

Oxitec will release half a billion gene-hacked mosquitoes, engineered to kill off the local bloodsucker population along a lengthy swathe of the Florida Keys.

Breeding and unleashing clouds of genetically engineered bugs sounds like science fiction, but it's already happening. Locally, some love the idea and others hate it — a fight which has turned ugly, with some residents even threatening to destroy Oxitec's equipment.

Supporters say it's a new way to rid the area of annoying, disease-spreading mosquitoes. But opponents are furious about what they describe as a biotech company coming in and strongarming their community into serving as a petri dish for a poorly vetted gene-hacking experiment.

[I]n a previous experiment conducted from 2013 to 2015, Oxitec released mosquitoes in Brazil that carried an earlier engineered gene, OX513A, and eventually released those with OX5034 as well. While the company declared the release a success, scientists unaffiliated with Oxitec from Yale and a handful of Brazilian institutions published research in the journal Nature Scientific Reports claiming some of the mosquitoes had mated, produced viable offspring, and ultimately created a new genetic hybrid population capable of surviving in the wild.

Those conclusions were vigorously contested by Oxitec, which pushed for a retraction. The journal has since slapped an Expression of Concern over some of its findings that still remains unaddressed.

Read the original post