

Viewpoint: Anti-GMO groups peddle anti-biotech propaganda in attempt to discredit NY Times' endorsement of safe and effective crop biotechnology

For years, the New York Times attacked crop biotechnology on the grounds that it was a corporate ploy hatched by Monsanto to take over the food supply. GMOs, [the argument went](#), were designed to hook farmers on Monsanto's patented seeds and pesticides while failing to deliver higher crop yields. In one memorable instance, Times reporter Eric Lipton [accused](#) high-profile scientists of helping Big Ag paint its products in a more positive light.

Things may be changing, though. The paper recently published an excellent essay, [Learning to Love G.M.O.s](#), by University of California, Berkeley, journalism professor Jennifer Kahn. Kahn offered a balanced analysis of the years-long debate over genetically engineered crops, appropriately summarizing the science while considering the reasonable questions consumers had about these misunderstood plants.

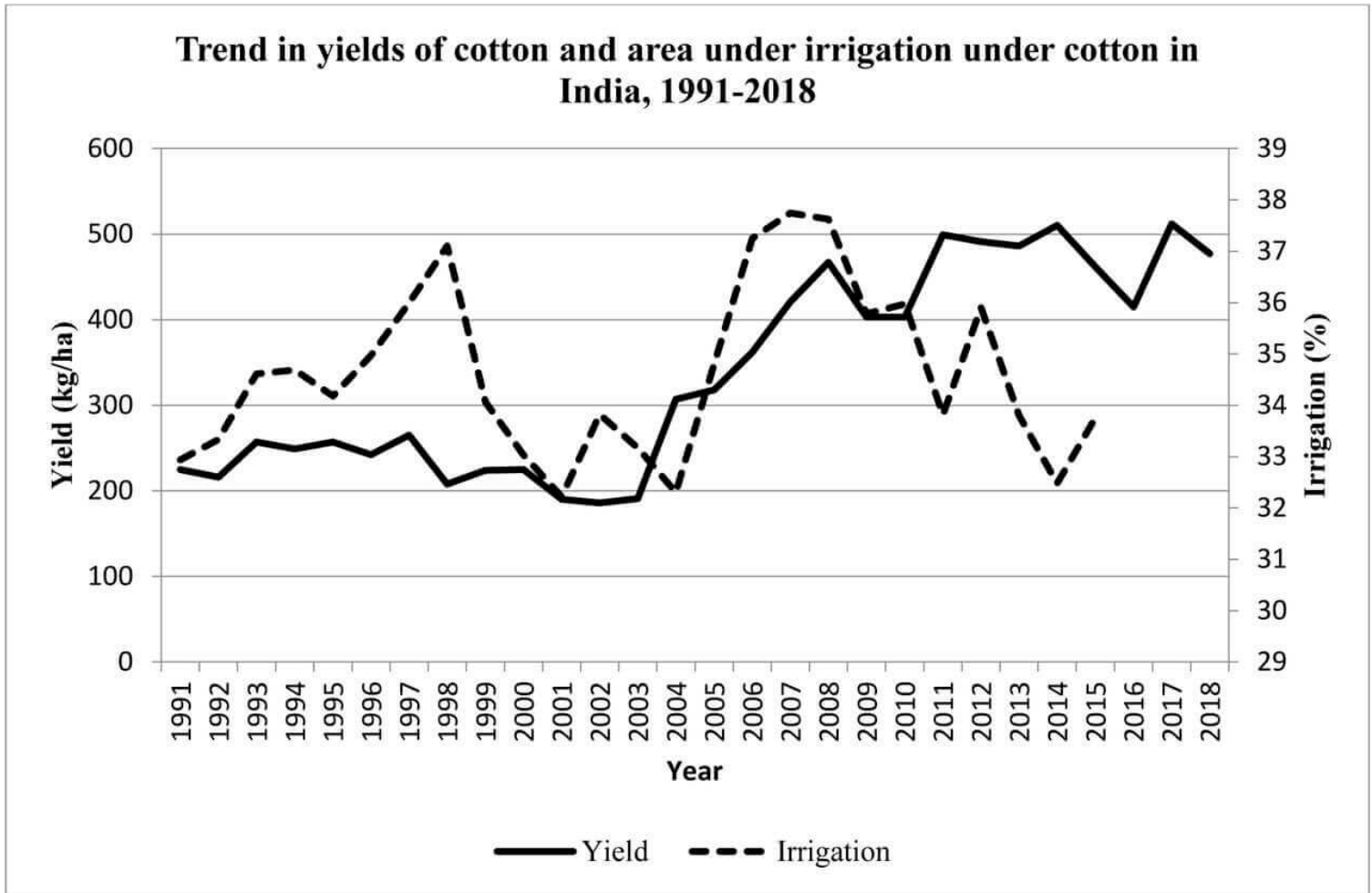
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For performing this excellent public service, Kahn was lambasted by the anti-GMO brain trust. [Natural News](#), [U.S. Right to Know](#) and [GM Watch](#) all took shots at the Times for publishing the article. These critiques are clones of one another and based on long-refuted assertions. Still, they're worth responding to on the occasion of a major newspaper abandoning its previous commitment to bad biotechnology reporting. We'll work from Natural News' rebuttal. Their quotes in italics, followed by my replies.

Kahn left out the fact that a review of two decades of data on Bt [insect-resistant] cotton in India revealed that GMO cotton is not increasing yields. Although it may have reduced the need for pesticides at first, insects eventually became resistant, and farmers are now spending more money on pesticides than they did before Bt was introduced.

That [review](#) was authored by Indian entomologist K. R. Kranthi and Washington University anthropologist Glenn Davis Stone. Kahn was right to ignore their conclusions because they were wrong. Insect-resistance can hinder the efficacy of Bt crops; no expert denies that this has been a problem in India. Despite this fact, the country's cotton yields increased dramatically after Bt crops were introduced in the early 2000s. Note the time period at which yields began to climb.



Agricultural economist Matin Quaim summarized the problems with Kranthi's and Stone's analysis in a letter published by [Nature Plants](#):

Results showed that—after controlling for all other factors—Bt adoption had increased cotton yields by 24%, farmers' profits by 50% and farm household living standards by 18%, with no indication that the benefits were fading during the 2002–2008 period. The same data also revealed that chemical insecticide quantities declined by more than 40% through Bt adoption, with the largest reductions in the most toxic active ingredients previously sprayed to control the American bollworm

Back to Natural News:

There is also the disaster of genetically engineered golden rice, which has long been hailed as a solution to vitamin A deficiency. This rice is nowhere near production, according to experts, and may even be shelved.

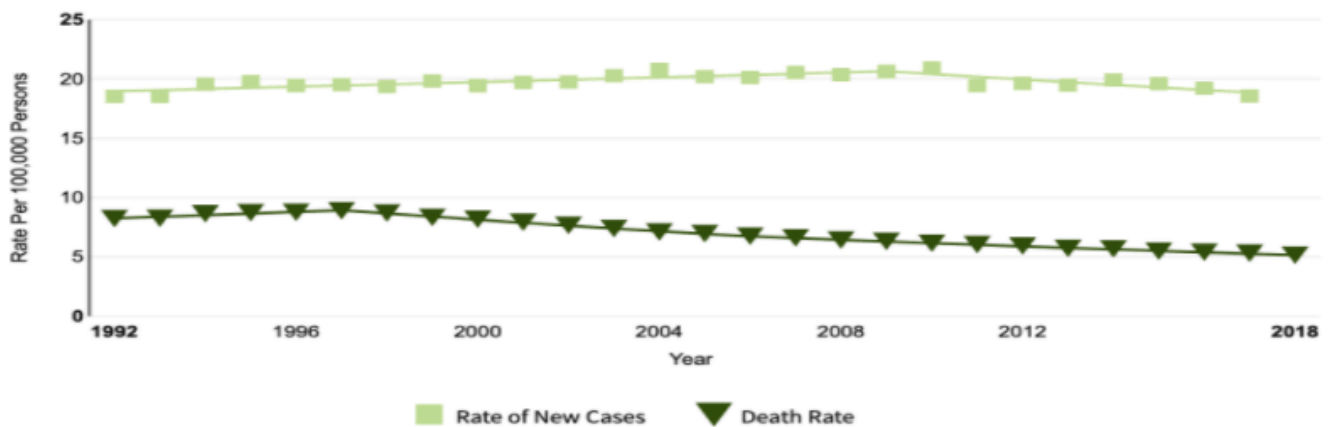
The introduction of Golden Rice (GR) was delayed for decades because skittish regulators, harassed by groups like Greenpeace, refused to approve the vitamin-fortified rice. The holdup had nothing to do with the safety or efficacy of the crop itself. As I wrote recently, The Philippines has finally given GR the green light [despite the anti-GMO movement's](#) continued agitation.

[US]Right to Know also notes that the journalism professor relied on a source that has been discredited. She quoted Mark Lynas, a writer who has been called out by scientists and food policy experts alike for his inaccurate claims about pesticides and GMOs.

Natural News and their allies dislike Lynas because he had the integrity to consider the evidence and [abandon his opposition](#) to crop biotechnology. He's a convert of sorts, and thus a [very effective](#) science advocate. His work is widely respected and he now works as a communications strategist at Cornell University's Alliance for Science. The "scientists and food policy experts" who have called out Lynas are a tiny minority of scholars who are either unfamiliar with the relevant evidence or just ignore it.

And what about the fact that the use of toxic herbicides like glyphosate, which has been linked to cancer, has increased 15-fold since GMOs were introduced? Does she care that genetically modified crops have also led to the emergence of superbugs and superweeds that need even more toxic poisons like 2,4-D to kill?

Glyphosate use has certainly increased in recent decades, but the incidence of Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, the group of cancers allegedly caused by exposure to the weedkiller, [has remained flat](#), and deaths have actually declined.

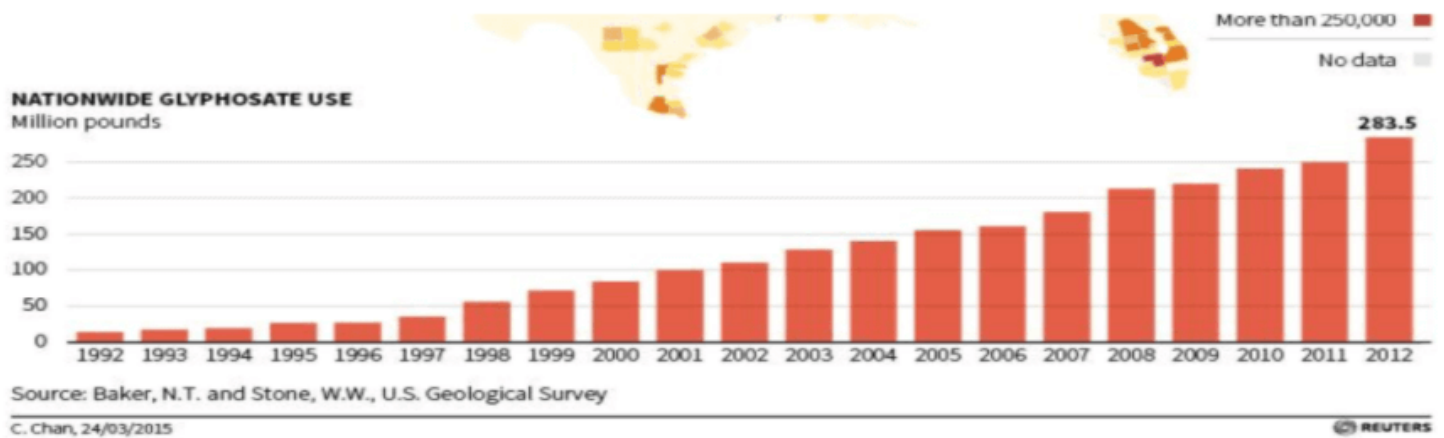


New cases come from SEER 13. Deaths come from U.S. Mortality.

All Races, Both Sexes. Rates are Age-Adjusted.

Modeled trend lines were calculated from the underlying rates using the [Joinpoint Trend Analysis Software](#).

New cases are also referred to as incident cases in other publications. Rates of new cases are also referred to as incidence rates.



Pesticide-resistant weeds and insects, as mentioned, are real but manageable threats. Genetic engineering [can be used](#) to reverse the resistance in various pests, and farmers can minimize the problem by [utilizing](#) a variety of chemistries. That's another reason efforts to ban pesticides are so dangerous: they make farmers dependent on fewer plant-protection products, which amplifies the very problem we all want to solve.

The corporate press [often botches](#) their science reporting and should be called out whenever they do. In this case, though, the Times did an admirable job and should be commended for it. The paper [recently profiled](#) "Crazy Joe" Mercola for spreading nonsense about coronavirus as well, so maybe this is the beginning of a positive trend. We'll keep our fingers crossed.

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