

# Genetically Engineered Foods: Impacts on Farmers



The Ohio Ecological Food  
and Farm Association

Genetic engineering (GE) refers to a set of technologies used to change the genetic makeup of cells to produce novel organisms that exhibit a desired trait, such as drought resistance. Not only does GE food affect consumers and the environment, it can have serious negative consequences for farmers. Non-GE farmers may be faced with certain challenges from a neighbor's choice to use GE-seeds.

## Negative Impacts on Farmers

### GE Contamination of Non-GE Crops

GE crops can contaminate non-GE crops. Organic fields can lose their certification if they become contaminated. The threat is significant, too: A Union of Concerned Scientists study found that 50 percent of non-GE corn and soybeans, and 80 percent of non-GE canola seeds in the U.S. were contaminated. Even crops without commercially approved equivalents are at risk of contamination due to the number of field tests conducted in the U.S. For example, in 2013, the USDA found GE wheat in an Oregon farmer's field. The incident was linked to a variety of wheat field-tested nearly a decade earlier.

### Farmers are Held Liable

Farmers who unknowingly plant or harvest GE crops as a result of contamination are considered legally responsible for patent infringement. One such example is that of Percy Schmeiser in Canada. Monsanto sued Schmeiser for saving and planting the GE seeds that grew on his land as a result of seed drift from his neighbor, which the company considered to be a violation of its patent. Monsanto won and collected the remaining seeds, all of the profits from the crops, and interest.

### At Risk of Increased Costs Over Time

Growers who sign contracts with biotech companies to use their seeds are prohibited from saving and/or reusing the seeds they bought. This means that every year farmers must buy new seeds to plant their crops, in addition to buying a select variety of agrochemicals that can be used in conjunction with GE seed. Farmers are at the mercy of the seed pricing set by the biotech company.

### Global Economic Market Loss

At least 35 countries have laws in place that impose labeling or import restrictions on GE food, including the European Union (EU), China, Australia, Russia, and Japan, which receives 20 percent of U.S. food exports. Within just a few years of the introduction of GE crops in the U.S., almost the entire \$300 million in annual U.S. corn exports to the EU disappeared, and the U.S. share of the world soy market decreased.

## Take Action Today!

### Support GE-free and Organic Agriculture

#### Vote with Your Dollars

Consumers can influence corporate decisions by buying GE-free and organic products. Find out how your food is grown.

#### Sign the Petition

You have a right to know what is in your food. Tell your elected officials they need to pass legislation requiring the labeling of GE foods sold in Ohio. Get the petition from our website.

#### Write a Letter to the Editor

Encourage decision makers to label GE foods by writing to your newspaper. See our letter-writing guide on our website.

#### Stay Informed and Involved Through OEFFA

OEFFA will update you on developments and actions you can take.

For resources or to join in, go to <http://policy.oeffa.org/gelabeling>

