

Genetically Engineered Foods: Impacts on Farmers



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 through pollen drift and also through the drift of pesticides that accompany GE crops. Organic fields can lose their certification if they become 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 U.S. Department of Agriculture found GE wheat in an Oregon farmer's fields. The incident was linked to a variety of wheat field-tested nearly a decade earlier. A 2016 survey of OEFFA certified farmers found that seven percent of grain growers have experienced genetic contamination.

Farmer Liability

Farmers who unknowingly plant or harvest GE crops as a result of contamination are considered legally responsible for patent infringement. Many farmers have battled costly legal suits brought by Monsanto, some losing their farms as a result. Currently there are no laws in place to protect farmers from the loss of crops, contracts, or relationships with buyers.

Seed and Input Pricing

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, 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. GE contamination is also impacting organic grain markets meaning a lost opportunity for U.S.-based sustainable food production.

Take Action Today!

*Support organic, diversified,
and local agriculture!*

Vote with Your Dollars

Consumers can influence corporate decisions by buying local and organic products.

Tell Your Story

If you have experienced GE or pesticide drift, contact OEFFA and tell your story. Help advocate for compensation for growers that experience drift.

Contact Your Legislators

Whether you are a farmer or an eater, your voice matters. Let your congressperson know that you support sustainable and organic food production and that is where we should be investing our tax dollars for research and support.

Engage with OEFFA

Stay connected with OEFFA members on GE issues. Go to <http://policy.oeffa.org/gelabeling> or contact OEFFA at policy@oeffa.org.

