Would you eat a pesticidal potato or a genetically mutated fish?

Unfortunately, this question isn't as much science fiction as you might think. Pesticidal potatoes – genetically engineered to include pesticides in each of their cells – have been on sale for years. Scientists are experimenting with salmon that grows at four times the natural rate. And many other genetically mutated foods are on the market or on the way.

Currently, these foods aren't even labeled. But Congress is considering legislation that would give consumers the basic right to know whether they are purchasing genetically altered foods. Please make your voice heard on this issue.

Understanding the problem

Genetically engineered foods now account for as much as two-thirds of all foods on supermarket shelves.
The first large-scale commercial harvest of genetically engineered crops in the United States happened in 1996. By 1999, already one-fourth of American crops were genetically engineered, including:

- 35 percent of all corn
- 55 percent of all soybeans
- nearly half of all cotton

Genetically engineered foods pose risks for human health.
Scientists have a host of concerns about the health risks that may be associated with GE foods. They fear that genetic engineering may: trigger allergies in people; create new toxins harmful to human health; lead to antibiotic resistance, and be linked with a resurgence of infectious diseases .

There may be other health implications as well. But since these foods have been rushed to market so quickly with inadequate safety testing, scientists remain in the dark about the long-term impacts of genetically engineered foods.

Genetically engineered foods are a threat to the environment.
Genetic engineers, for instance, have produced "supersalmon" that grow at four times the natural rate of natural salmon. Ecologists fear that if these are accidentally released into the wild, they could decimate natural salmon populations. Moreover, millions of acres of GE crops have been planted across the United States, and many scientists are concerned that these mutated crops may be spread by bird, insect or wind to non-GE crops, and the wilderness. Many of the new GE crops, such as Roundup Ready soybeans, are engineered to tolerate heavier doses of pesticides. These pesticides will inevitably find their way into our water and food supply, endangering humans and wildlife.

What you can do

Support labeling of genetically engineered foods by sending letters to politicians and the media.
The Campaign to Label Genetically Engineered Foods makes this easy for you by providing ready-to-mail letters on its web site, at www.thecampaign.org. Print these letters, or send e-mail letters.

Educate yourself and your friends about the issues.
Share what you learn with co- workers, people in community groups, friends, family, and anyone else you can reach. The clear majority of Americans, when they learn about the issue, want genetically engineered foods to be labeled. The problem is, a lot of Americans don't know much yet about the issue. That's where you can make a huge difference.

Buy organically grown foods.
If you want to avoid eating genetically mutated foods, one of the best ways is to buy organic. The organic food industry is growing at a whopping 20 percent or more per year, and many regular supermarkets as well as health food stores now carry organic produce and other products. Organic foods are free of genetically engineered organisms.

The Campaign to Label Genetically Engineered Foods • www.thecampaign.org
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