

## Looking at media views - GM crops

Many stories and many points of view are presented to us in media stories. Is the information presented scientifically accurate and complete? Is the point of view being expressed biased or designed to persuade the reader to a particular point of view? What should we look for in order to answer these questions?

In this activity you will work in groups and individually to analyse three newspaper stories about impacts of genetically modified organisms on the environment. The articles and your discussions will allow you to come to some personal conclusion about the answer to the question 'Are genetically modified organisms good or bad for the environment?'

### You will need:

- the three newspaper articles provided with this activity sheet; and
- access to newspaper or magazine articles or the TV news for a few days. (Your teacher may provide some newspaper or magazine clippings or video clips.)

### What to do:

Work in a group.

1. Read each of the articles and summarise in one or two sentences the main arguments. Is the person being quoted for or against gene technology?
2. Under a heading of FOR or AGAINST or NEUTRAL put your group's summary for each article on a display board with those of the other groups in the class.
3. With each group taking a different article:
  - make a list of which of the points in the article is fact and which is an opinion. Is it hard to tell the difference?
  - decide who would benefit most if the point of view presented in the article was accepted by the public. Does this mean that the person quoted would benefit?

---

## Biotechnology Online School Resource

*Increasing the public's general awareness of biotechnology and its uses, through the provision of balanced and factual information explaining the technology, its applications, and regulations to safeguard people and the environment.*

For further information contact the Gene Technology Information Service on freecall **1800 631 276**.

[www.biotechnology.gov.au](http://www.biotechnology.gov.au) | © Biotechnology Australia 2001

- decide whether you feel the people being quoted are telling the full story, part of the story or just giving their points of view.
4. Select a member of your group to present your conclusions to the class.
  5. Having listened to all the group reports, decide on your answer to the question 'Are genetically modified organisms safe?' and write an answer in the form of a press release that quotes you as a member of the public. You may combine points from two or more of the articles you have read so as to give a more balanced view or you may write a completely new article.
  6. Investigate newspapers, magazines, TV news or the internet for a story about GM organisms and the environment. Analyse the story to decide whether it is balanced or if there is a possible vested interest behind opinions being put forward. Look for facts, opinions, who will benefit if the point of view presented is accepted, and whether the complete story is being presented. Write a report on the story.

### **The media stories**

#### Story 1

#### **We need to know more about biotechnology**

While we have made rapid advances in gene technology we need to be cautious about how quickly we adopt it, in case we accidentally cause irreparable damage to the environment.

This is the opinion of Dr David Dempster of the Cooperative Research Centre for environmental management of biotechnology, located at the University of the Tablelands.

Dr Dempster said, 'While we see many benefits from genetically modified crops and animals, there is so much more we don't know. We need to slow down our adoption of this technology while we undertake thorough studies of the possible impacts on the environment.'

He also said, 'These studies have to be large scale and very thorough. For instance there are studies that show that genetically modified corn in the USA was killing monarch butterflies, and other studies that showed that it wasn't harming them at all.'

---

### **Biotechnology Online School Resource**

*Increasing the public's general awareness of biotechnology and its uses, through the provision of balanced and factual information explaining the technology, its applications, and regulations to safeguard people and the environment.*

For further information contact the Gene Technology Information Service on freecall **1800 631 276**.

[www.biotechnology.gov.au](http://www.biotechnology.gov.au) | © Biotechnology Australia 2001

‘The Australian environment is very sensitive and we might discover that some genetically modified organisms have a bigger adverse impact here than they might in Europe or North America.’

Dr Dempster said he did not support a moratorium on the introduction of GMOs, but advocated using the 'precautionary principle' in making risk-benefit analysis of their introduction.

‘The technology is very new and we have no real long-term data on possible impacts upon the environment,’ he said.

## Story 2

### **Call for ten-year moratorium on GM organisms**

Genetically modified organisms are a threat to Australia's fragile ecosystem and we should have a ten-year moratorium on all GMOs, according to Mr Simon Simpkins of the Green Zone Alliance.

Speaking at a public rally in Brisbane today, Mr Simpkins said that Australia should become a GM - free nation, and should only grow organic foods.

‘Scientists tell us the technology is safe, but they also told us that nuclear power was safe,’ he said.

‘GMOs can easily breed into superweeds which will take over the country, and we might also see superbugs, which have the potential to devastate life on our planet,’ he said.

He also said that as the technology was controlled by multinational companies, they were forcing Australian farmers to become reliant on growing GM crops and buying pesticides from the same companies to spray onto those crops.

‘We need to stand up to these forces and demand a ten-year moratorium to protect ourselves and our environment,’ he said.

## Story 3

### **GM organisms - good for the environment**

---

## **Biotechnology Online School Resource**

*Increasing the public's general awareness of biotechnology and its uses, through the provision of balanced and factual information explaining the technology, its applications, and regulations to safeguard people and the environment.*

For further information contact the Gene Technology Information Service on freecall **1800 631 276**.

[www.biotechnology.gov.au](http://www.biotechnology.gov.au) | © Biotechnology Australia 2001

Genetically modified organisms will be good for the environment, according to Dr Dianne Millward, the Executive Director of the US-based Biotechnology Alliance.

Speaking in Melbourne yesterday, Dr Millward said that use of genetically engineered crops was already leading to decreases in pesticides and herbicides world-wide, which was good for the environment.

‘Surveys show that consumers are more concerned about pesticides than they are about GM foods,’ she said.

She also said that biotechnology could also be used to eliminate pests, develop plants that could grow in drought conditions and even clean up oil spills.

‘This is a good and natural technology for our planet,’ she said, ‘And it is important that anti-biotechnology groups don’t scare people away from its benefits.’

‘Without the introduction of biotechnology solutions we are going to see increased damage done to our waterways, more land clearance to feed the growing population and more species becoming extinct,’ she said.

The Biotechnology Alliance, which is co-funded by industry groups and university research institutes, seeks to provide more information on biotechnology to the public.

---

## **Biotechnology Online School Resource**

---

*Increasing the public's general awareness of biotechnology and its uses, through the provision of balanced and factual information explaining the technology, its applications, and regulations to safeguard people and the environment.*

For further information contact the Gene Technology Information Service on freecall **1800 631 276**.

[www.biotechnology.gov.au](http://www.biotechnology.gov.au) | © Biotechnology Australia 2001