



Discussion Topic

October 2007

A monthly resource for the Community Action Groups of Michigan Farm Bureau

QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe that America's food is more dangerous or less dangerous today as the result of biotechnology? Please present evidence for your position.
2. What can your county Farm Bureau do to educate consumers about biotechnology so they can make informed decisions instead of forming opinions based on fear?
3. Why, in your opinion, is the biotechnology issue popping up now when biotech food has been on the shelves for years?

Biotechnology: Bane or boon?

Mention biotechnology, and there tend to be two schools of thought.

The first is that it's just a fancy word for science moving forward to improve plant health and animal genetics, just as has happened ever since the first cross-pollinated plant or artificially inseminated cow.

The second train of thought is that biotech is "Frankenfood," a dangerous bane on society that is poisoning our food supply and promoted without conscience by greedy, faceless corporations.

The truth, as often is true, lies somewhere in the middle.

Genetic mutations feared by the anti-biotech crowd have yet to materialize, mainly, they say, because the unproven science has not been around long enough to draw conclusions about its safety or effect on the environment.

But, say proponents, biotech crops such as hybrid corn have been on American dinner tables for years, and our life spans have increased. The public in general is stronger, bigger and healthier than ever before.

Besides, they'll say, non-biotech corn, for example, would not have survived, much less thrived and made record crops, under several years of drought conditions. With biotechnology, insects and diseases that can ruin crops can't get a foothold, insuring the public a steadier, year-round supply of nutritious food.

Recently, however, the issue has gotten political attention since a judge decided to put a permanent ban on Roundup Ready alfalfa, even though thousands of acres have already been planted. Those acres are "grandfathered in," but no more can legally be planted. And if it sets a precedent which leads to bans on other biotech crops, it is feared that yields will tumble and this nation may face a food shortage.

While much of the debate centers around fear of the unknown, there seem to be few in the middle ground on the issue, and it may well be decided in court, not in the marketplace or on the farm.