

Commentary

Monsanto For the Win!

Abe Greenwald

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On Wednesday night, [Intelligence Squared U.S.](#) held an enlightening debate on genetically modified foods on the Upper West Side of Manhattan (video [here](#)). As anyone with a web browser knows, companies like Monsanto are now routinely portrayed in the media (especially social media) as the epitome of corporate evil. The idea is that GMO companies are remorselessly destroying the earth and poisoning mankind with Frankenstein foods in order to line the pockets of their one-percenter CEOs. Well, a fascinating thing happened very early in the debate that shed light on all this. Charles Benbrook, a research professor at the Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources was asked about the scientific consensus, developed over 20 years, on the health impact of genetically modified food. Here's his response:

I've read essentially all the statements by various bodies. And here's what they essentially all say. They use slightly different words. They say that genetic – the genetic engineering of food as a technology does not create any new or different potential risks in the modified foods that other forms of plant breeding don't. Several of the reports, including both of the two national academy of science reports that specifically address this say that there is a possibility that genetically engineered foods may pose higher risk of that nature, but we really don't know. They also all say that there's no convincing evidence now or at this point that there's been acute health problems in the U.S. population from the consumption of genetically engineered foods. And then they all go on to call for further investment in the development of more sensitive, scientific techniques to assess the possibility risks, and they also call for post approval surveillance. Most of the recommendations for better science, more careful risk assessment and post market surveillance that have been made for over 15 years, and these reports have not been acted upon.

Here's why this was fascinating: Benbrook was on the team arguing *against* GMOs. He's the cream of the anti-GMO crop and he concedes that there's essentially no evidence of baleful health effects owing to genetically modified foods. Sure, he insinuates that the 20 years of studies might be the wrong studies. But that's just the weak sauce offered up by devoted adherents of all failed ideologies— *true* communism has yet to be tried, you know?

The rest of the night went the same way. Crop yield, environmental concerns, you name it—it was a clean sweep for the pro-GMO side. At one point Benbrook's anti-GMO teammate Margaret Mellon, a former senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists, conceded that she had no interest in

banning GMOs at all. Rather, she just thinks they haven't done *as much* good as they were intended to do and should therefore be "set off to the side of the stage."

It was an official trouncing. In an audience vote taken before the debate 32 percent were in favor of genetically modified foods and 30 percent were against (the rest were undecided). After the debate, 60 percent were for and 31 percent against.

We see here the intellectual gulf that separates the hyperbolic social-media activist and the thoughtful expert in the field. Progressive Facebook crusaders are forever telling us we're anti-science if we don't accept their doomsday prophecies. Tell it to the scientists.