

GMO - OMG!

There are some things in life that have a profound effect on us. One of these is the very moment your first child is born. Having children makes you start seeing everything differently. It was the first time that either my wife, Holly, or I had to feed someone besides ourselves. Suddenly, (after nine months of waiting of course) you have a little life to nourish and look out for. And that responsibility changes you. It changes each of us differently, with the birth of my children I suddenly felt very concerned that I become a good provider; that I got a good job and moved up the ladder into a management position. My wife and I now find ourselves raising our 3 ½ year old grandson and just like when my own children were born, having him around and the fact that I am in a different place in my life at 50 then I was thirty years ago, has changed me again, this time it made me think more about food than I ever had before.

It's hard enough just raising a family, but then, all these unexpected issues complicate what's already so exhausting. You find out about toxic chemicals in your house, asbestos in the walls, BPA in baby bottles, methyl iodide on strawberries, lead in toys, arsenic and heavy metals in tap water, antibiotics in meat, flame retardant from furniture in breast milk. It is enough to make you crazy!

Everything causes cancer and it's all subtle, hidden, and latent. We all try to be awake and make good decisions, to look out for our children and grandchildren and to do our best for them, but this one thing most of us totally missed. We just never heard much or knew much about GMOs, genetically modified organisms, and the role they were playing in our everyday lives.

Seeds, like the normal seeds I had been growing and saving all of my life but with altered genes were something new to me and it scared me to think that they were in our food for either good or ill, I didn't know, but it bothered me that we were eating them and didn't even know what they were. I decided to see if anyone else knew about GMOs, and that was the beginning of a very long journey.

Nobody, or at least very few people that I asked, knew what GMOs were, and most did not know what even one of the three letters stood for.

How is it possible that we, as a first world nation are all so clueless? It felt weird not knowing something so basic about one of the most essential things in our lives. I suddenly felt uneasy about all the food we were eating. So, I did some research to answer a very basic question. What is a GMO?

According to the World Health Organization:

“GMOs are organisms in which the genetic material has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally.”

Fine, but what does that mean exactly?

It gets complicated pretty quickly. They involve *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* and vectors and Ti-plasmids and Cry1Ab genes taken from soil-dwelling bacteria called *Bacillus thuringiensis*. They are glyphosate resistant enzymes called EPSPS and my favorite one, they are a gene gun with protoplast electroporation bombarding cells with gold particles which have been coated with DNA encoding.

But in plain English, there are two basic types of GMOs, **pesticide producers and herbicide resisters**.

A **pesticide producer** kills insects like Monsanto's Bt corn. A gene from a naturally occurring bacterium is inserted into the DNA of corn. The modified corn produces a toxin lethal to insects.

An **herbicide resister** is immune to weed killer like Roundup Ready soy. The DNA is altered with a soil bacterium's gene to make the plant immune to the weed killer called Roundup. Farmers douse their fields with Roundup to kill every weed and unwanted plant, but even when coated in herbicide, the soy plant remains unharmed.

I couldn't find anything definitive on the health effects of GMOs. Most studies were only three months in length, done by the same company selling the GMOs. The studies aren't peer reviewed and they refused to release the raw data to the public.

Were they hiding something?

Were we all a part of some gigantic experiment?

Or, maybe, GMOs make us stronger and faster and healthier, who knows?

But didn't we even have a choice in the matter?

Was there a way to opt out if you wanted to?

And then something happened that really awakened me to a much bigger story about seeds and food and control. What was it? An earthquake in Haiti.

No Really.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. People suffer from crippling poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. The earthquake made an already desperate situation much worse. With hundreds of thousands dead and countless bodies lost beneath the rubble and over a million people crammed into tent cities, the agrochemical company Monsanto offered Haiti 475 tons of seeds. The government of Haiti was thrilled to get the seeds but the poor citizens of that suffering country were smarter.

The word got out, "We, the peasants of Haiti, are the guardians of the seeds of life. At the moment, we see the seeds of death... invading our country." They organized neighborhood seed burnings and yep, they burned Monsanto's GMO seeds!

One anonymous man spread the word, "...the objective of Monsanto is to make money. The objective of Monsanto is not the quality of food that people are eating. Monsanto's objective is not to protect life. It's not to protect the environment. When people like me see these types of seeds are poisonous, when I see these seeds are destroying the life of the land and destroying the people... That's when I attack the interests of Monsanto."

So he and thousands of other marched in the streets and spread the word, burning the GMO seeds at every opportunity!

"Peasants in the country, Peasants in the North, Peasants in the South, Peasants in the West... Let's stop them! It was to change life, the seeds Monsanto sent to us. Understand? We wanted to have our own homegrown seeds to plant. We plant produce that you can plant every year. But with the Monsanto seeds, you can plant them just one time. That's why we didn't take it. They say they have a gift to give you. But it is a gift to kill you. It is a gift to destroy you, to destroy who you are. Because for us in Haiti, seeds are something sacred. A blessed natural thing. We marched against it, so that the good seeds wouldn't leave Haiti. If we accepted what Monsanto was giving, we would have lost much more than the earthquake took from us!"

Wow! If that is not eye opening, I just don't know what is!

So what it boils down to here is that we have a choice, wise up or wither and die. I think consumers have an important role to play in pushing their countries to change their modes of agriculture and the way foods, all foods, are labeled. The Haitians weren't the only ones protesting genetically modified seeds in the biotech industry. Resistance was springing up all over the world. For Haiti, accepting Monsanto's "gift" would have meant losing their own seeds, their food sovereignty, an essential piece of their culture and a way of being. And they were fighting for something that we in the United States had lost without even knowing we were giving it up! In Haiti they believe that the seeds of life are the common inheritance of all humanity, as numerous and diverse as the stars above, owned by none, and shared by all. At that time almost no one was marching against GMO seeds here in America. There were few protests in the streets. It was business as usual and people were lining up to eat food that ultimately comes from the same chemical company that the farmers in Haiti were crying out against.

Taking all of this in, I had to do something however small. So, I began at the most obvious place, in my own home and garden. I chose to research which foods contained GMO ingredients and tried to avoid them, I grew healthy, organic vegetables in my garden being sure to use non-GMO seeds, and I tried to get the word out to friends and neighbors. I still am.

That is why I am sending this out to all of you now.

Companies like Monsanto and many others want to keep you in the dark - even though more than 90 percent of Americans want GMO foods labeled. Vermont, Maine and Connecticut have already passed laws to require GMO labeling, and over the past two years, more than 70 bills have been introduced in 30 states to require labeling.

Now is the time to act. More than 80 percent of crops like corn and soy are genetically engineered. Some 60 to 70 percent of processed foods in American grocery stores contain some genetically engineered ingredients. And the first genetically engineered animal could soon be introduced into the U.S. food supply – salmon. If you, like me, find this unacceptable then the time to act is now!

Unbelievably, there is no national regulation here in the United States requiring these foods to be labeled in any way what so ever, so you don't know what you are eating. Take action *right now*.

[Click here to add your name to our petition to the FDA. GMO foods need to be labeled!](#)

Thank you for taking action. We have a right to know what we are eating; it really is as simple as that.

Sincerely,
Joe Urbach

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