

# The Sensible Environmentalist

(NAPS)—DEAR DR. MOORE:

**Why are scientists putting so much emphasis on genetically modified foods—is this something we really need to pursue?**



Dr. Moore

Genetically modified foods have great benefits for human health and our environment—so yes, I believe it is something we need to pursue.

Genetic breakthroughs in agriculture are already enabling us to prevent certain diseases and pest infestations in food crops while reducing the use of chemical pesticides and without affecting non-harmful species.

Second, and perhaps the most important environmental benefit, is the ability to increase the productivity of our agricultural lands, which is critical as the world's population continues to grow. The more food we're able to grow on an acre of land, the less land we have to clear for agriculture. That means we can keep more land as forests, grasslands, savannas and other wilderness areas.

In addition to the environmental gains, genetically modified foods have already proven to have enormous potential for improving human health. One example is golden rice, which will eventually be available for commercial planting. By splicing a gene from daffodils into rice plants, two Swiss scientists have created rice that contains carotene, which the body

converts to vitamin A. Given that every year some 500,000 people, mainly children in India and Africa, go blind due to vitamin A deficiency, this rice has the potential to significantly reduce human suffering.

Genetic modification is an extension of the cross-breeding that's been going on throughout agricultural history to create the foods we know and depend on today. Genetically modified foods undergo extensive testing and scientists have yet to find a negative health consequence. I believe most criticism is founded not in the science we know, but in political agendas and the desire to raise alarm—and doesn't account for the potential to protect and enhance human health and the environment.

It's important to treat any scientific breakthrough with caution, but the idea that we should stop learning and applying knowledge in the real world doesn't make sense. The benefits of genetic modification are too great.

Given their tremendous potential for good, I believe that a sensible environmentalist would support continued research and the application of those agricultural advances that are shown to have a positive impact on human health and the environment.

*Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder and former president of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions for Dr. Moore can be sent to [Patrick@SensibleEnvironmentalist.com](mailto:Patrick@SensibleEnvironmentalist.com).*