

Genetically-modified food for thought

The world will have another three billion mouths to feed within the next five decades. It therefore makes sense to review the options by which the planet secures its food supplies. Genetically-modified crops, as the Government yesterday suggested, are one major option. Many in the environmental movement respond to that idea with outright opposition. But an ideological response is unhelpful. Population growth means the world needs more food from fewer inputs and GM offers an avenue which must be explored. Fears about cross-contamination of GM and non-GM plant genes during experiments must be addressed. But regulation must be sensible rather than a backdoor form of prohibition. GM maize, soya and cotton have been cultivated elsewhere in the world for the best part of a decade and thrown up no major health or ecological problems.

There are other valid concerns. Too much of the research into genetic modification has been conducted by major corporations like Monsanto whose chief aim is to increase sales of pesticides, herbicides and increasingly outdated oil-based fertilisers. Too little cash has been forthcoming from governments for the development of crops like Golden Rice, which would add Vitamin A to rice to counter the deficiency which causes blindness in around half a million children every year.

Funding is needed for work on using GM to insert vaccines into bananas, tomatoes or orange juice for countries too poor for extensive refrigerated vaccine distribution. Above all, we need to increase the amounts of public sector cash which is made available, across the world, for using GM to discover how to grow those staple food crops on which the world's poorest people depend – and with less water, greater pest-resistance, less fertiliser, greater salt tolerance and on land which has hitherto proven too marginal for productive cultivation.

That requires a co-ordinated approach across a whole raft of the departments and agencies in major governments throughout the developed and developing world. The deterioration expected in the climate brought on by global warming makes this an area where rapid but painstaking progress is a matter of urgency.

Source: The Independent / January 2015

1 Text comprehension

Read the text and answer in complete sentences. Use your own words. Don't quote.

- 1.1 Explain why genetically-modified crops are considered a major option to secure the planet's food supply.
- 1.2 Outline the concerns about the use of GM food.
- 1.3 Point out advantages of GM food mentioned in the text.
- 1.4 The text mentions „the deterioration expected in the climate brought on by global warming“. Beyond the text, think of possibilities you personally have to protect the environment.

2 Beyond the text

"It is important to know where my food comes from, how it was produced and if it is genetically modified."

Comment on this statement and write a text of about 250 words.