Science Societies

Enlightened oversight of genetically engineered crops

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Sarah Collinson of Corteva Agriscience (left) evaluating pollination in Kenya with Kenya Agriculture Research and Livestock Organization (KALRO) collaborators.

The regulatory oversight of genetically engineered crops is disproportionate to the risk they pose. Public fears (fanned by misinformation and often amplified on social media) drive the calls for regulation. However, scientists agree that genetic engineering is as safe as traditional breeding.

In a recent article in *Agricultural & Environmental Letters*, the authors point out that the human health and environmental benefits afforded by genetically engineered crops have been severely limited due to a quarter century of onerous oversight. Genetic engineering is necessary to feed a growing population under the threat of climate change while improving the sustainability of agriculture. Scientists need to be able to use the full suite of modern breeding methods to increase yields while decreasing the environmental impact and footprint of food production.

The impediments preventing development of beneficial crops using biotechnology have resulted in the loss of a full human generation's worth of benefits. Letting public fear drive government policy can have costs in the form of human suffering. The authors call on progressive countries to take the lead in implementing enlightened public policy, based on sound evidence, for the oversight of genetically engineered crops. To gain public support, the authors recommend redirecting resources from risk-disproportionate legislation into factual communication aimed to counteract misinformation.

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Herman, R.A., Gaffney, J., & Storer, N.P. (2020). Enlightened oversight of genetically engineered crops for the next generation. *Agricultural & Environmental Letters, 5*. https://doi.org/10.1002/ael2.20004

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