



**LET THEM EAT PRECAUTION:
HOW POLITICS IS UNDERMINING THE
GENETIC REVOLUTION IN AGRICULTURE**

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More than one million of the world's poorest children die each year from a lack of Vitamin A. Another 100 million children suffer from Vitamin A deficiency, which increases the risk of blindness, infections, and diseases such as measles and malaria. Yet a revolutionary solution to this malignant crisis—a vitamin-enhanced rice—remains unutilized, the victim of anti-science advocacy groups.

The sad fate of Golden Rice, the genetically modified version of the world's most popular staple, is one of many revelations in *Let Them Eat Precaution: How Politics Is Undermining the Genetic Revolution in Agriculture* (AEI Press, January 2006). Bioengineering has created new kinds of soybeans, wheat, and cotton that generate natural insecticides (making them more resistant to pests and drought and increasing yields); nutrition-added fruits, vegetables, and grains; and futuristic “farmaceuticals”—life-saving medicines made by melding agricultural methods with advanced biotechnology. Countless scientific studies have found that biotech farming can dramatically reduce reliance on costly and environmentally harmful chemicals, and the products that result are safe and healthy.

Editor Jon Entine, along with ten experts from the United States and Great Britain, explain why cultural politics and trade disputes, not science, pose the biggest hurdles in developing these products. Instead of meeting the desperate needs of the world's poor with new medicines and vitamin-fortified crops, anti-biotech campaigners offer liberal doses of the “precautionary principle”—the controversial notion that innovation should be shelved unless all risks can be avoided. Well-funded environmental groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth; organic advocates; religious groups such as Christian Aid; and “socially responsible” investors exploit anxiety about science, caricaturing genetic technology as inherently unpredictable and a “genetic Godzilla” that could usher in an age of “Frankenfoods.”

Among the other findings in *Let Them Eat Precaution*:

- Some 40,000 people—half of them children—die every day from hunger or malnutrition-related causes that genetically modified products could alleviate.
- International advocacy groups have intimidated the Zambian and Zimbabwean governments into rejecting donations of bioengineered grain that would have helped feed the 10.1 million undernourished people in those two countries.
- Biopharmaceuticals such as potatoes transformed into edible vaccines against diarrhea—a leading cause of death in the developing world—and tobacco modified to fight dental cavities, the common cold, and diabetes are caught in a regulatory jungle.
- Anti-biotechnology groups funded by tax-exempt foundations, the social investment community, and the organic and natural products industry masterfully exploit the Internet to spread their message.

- The misinformation campaign has turned one of the founders of Greenpeace into a determined spokesperson for the promise of biotech farming and pharmaceuticals.

The anti-biotech industry's admonition of "Don't tamper with nature" may be superficially seductive, but a blanket rule that nature's course is always preferable to scientific innovation is a prescription for paralysis. The authors of *Let Them Eat Precaution* believe that proponents of biotechnology must reorient their strategy to address the political, social, moral, and economic arguments raised by biotech opponents, rather than relying simply on the scientific evidence. While not a universal panacea, genetically modified technology offers a unique opportunity to address international health and nutrition needs, especially in countries with increasing populations, widespread poverty, and limited funds for expensive and environmentally harmful chemical pesticides.

Let Them Eat Precaution includes

- **"Beyond Precaution"** by **Jon Entine**, scholar in residence at Miami University of Ohio, and adjunct fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.
- **"Global Views on Agricultural Biotechnology"** by **Thomas Jefferson Hoban**, director of the Center for Biotechnology in a Global Society and professor in the departments of sociology, anthropology, and food science at North Carolina State University. Mr. Hoban is also a member of the Advisory Committee on Agricultural Biotechnology at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- **"Agricultural Biotechnology Caught in a War of Giants"** by **C.S. Prakash**, professor of plant biotechnology at Tuskegee University and president of AgBio World Foundation; and by **Gregory Conko**, senior fellow and director of food safety policy at the Competitive Enterprise Institute.
- **"Trade War or Culture War? The GM Debate in Britain and the European Union"** by **Tony Gilland**, science and society director at the British Institute of Ideas.
- **"Hunger, Famine, and the Promise of Biotechnology"** by **Andrew S. Natsios**, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).
- **"Let Them Eat Precaution: Why GM Crops Are Being Over-Regulated in the Developing World"** by **Robert L. Paarlberg**, professor of political science at Wellesley College; associate of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University; and consultant for the International Food Policy Research Institute, USAID, USDA, and U.S. State Department.
- **"Can Public Support for the Use of Biotechnology in Food Be Salvaged?"** by **Carol Tucker Foreman**, director of the Food Policy Institute at the Consumer Federation of America and former assistant secretary for food and consumer services at the USDA.
- **"Deconstructing the Agricultural Biotechnology Protest Industry"** by **Jay Byrne**, president of v-Fluence Interactive Public Relations (dealing with issues management, including biotechnology).
- **"'Functional Foods' and Biopharmaceuticals: The Next Generation of the GM Revolution"** by **Martina Newell-McGloughlin**, director of the Systemwide Biotechnology Research and Education Program at the University of California–Davis; co-director of the NIH Training Program in Biomolecular Technology; member of the Genomics Panel on Technology of the WTO; and member of the Technology Discussion Panel on Sustainable Agriculture at the UN.
- **"Challenging the Misinformation Campaign of Antibiotchnology Environmentalists"** by **Patrick Moore**, founding member of Greenpeace and former director of Greenpeace International. Mr. Moore now heads the environmental group Greenspirit in Vancouver, Canada.