



Genetic Engineering

Genetic Engineering (sometimes called genetic modification and bio-technology) involves the use of highly sophisticated methods to transfer a selected pieces of genetic code (DNA) from one organism into the cells of other organisms (typically from another biological families), for the purpose of permanently altering their biological traits. Desired traits might be increased yield or resistance to certain diseases for target farm crops.

This relatively recent technology has gained a foothold in the world's food system, particularly North America, largely on the basis of promises by the biotech industry that it would lead to cures for many diseases or congenital defects, increase world food production to keep pace with population growth, and even allow the development of organisms that are able to carry out unique and useful tasks for human benefit.

However, not only have the products of biotechnology frequently fallen short of their lofty promises, but they have opened what many critics fear is a Pandora's Box of alarming unintended side-effects, including long-term health risks.

It is not within the scope of this publication to analyze these controversies. But there is one dimension to genetic engineering that is highly disturbing from the standpoint of QEW's special focus on spirituality and ecology: QEW members are among those raising questions about what narrowly focused and profit-driven manipulation of the world's genetic stock is doing to fundamental relationships among humans and between humans and the natural community. At stake are basic patterns of living that affect our self-concept and sense of purpose in life. When virtually everything in nature can be subverted to human whims and fancies, we lose forever the sense of the sacredness of Creation that up to now has kept the scope and impact of human activities at a level that the natural systems of the earth can sustain. Paraphrasing the words of Jesus, "What does it profit humanity to gain complete control over nature and end up losing its soul?"

As an introduction to this particular critique of genetic engineering, we offer an article on genetically modified foods (GMFs) by QEW supporter Tracy McCowen, who works as a "bioethicist" and consultant in agricultural matters.

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