



Food, Inc.: Mendel to Monsanto--The Promises and Perils of the Biotech Harvest

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For most people, the global war over genetically modified foods is a distant and confusing one. The battles are conducted in the mystifying language of genetics. A handful of corporate "life science" giants, such as Monsanto, are pitted against a worldwide network of anticorporate ecowarriors like Greenpeace. And yet the possible benefits of biotech agriculture to our food supply are too vital to be left to either partisan.

The companies claim to be leading a new agricultural revolution that will save the world with crops modified to survive frost, drought, pests, and plague. The greens warn that "playing God" with plant genes is dangerous. It could create new allergies, upset ecosystems, destroy biodiversity, and produce uncontrollable mutations. Worst of all, the antibiotech forces say, a single food conglomerate could end up telling us what to eat.

In "Food, Inc.," acclaimed journalist Peter Pringle shows how both sides in this overheated conflict have made false promises, engaged in propaganda science, and indulged in fear-mongering. In this urgent dispatch, he suggests that a fertile partnership between consumers, corporations, scientists, and farmers could still allow the biotech harvest to reach its full potential in helping to overcome the problem of world hunger, providing nutritious food and keeping the environment healthy.

Food, Inc.: Mendel to Monsanto--The Promises and Perils of the Biotech Harvest **Details**

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From Reader Review *Food, Inc.: Mendel to Monsanto--The Promises and Perils of the Biotech Harvest* for online ebook

Jenifer says

This was an interesting book. I always just thought about the health ramifications of genetically modified food, but there are so many other issues. Like the way big corporations have exploited poor farmer's from underdeveloped countries and how GM foods affect the economy of third world countries. It was also really scary to learn how the government regulates this industry. The regulations are SO lax that it is really scary!!!!

Katie says

In *Food, Inc.* Peter Pringle explains the scientific, political, and legal history of genetically modified foods. The book was written in 2003, so it is incredibly dated as far as the subject matter goes, but I was looking for a book that was somewhat unbiased and not sensationalist, and they are few and far between with this incredibly controversial issue.

I don't think I will ever completely understand how genetics works or how scientists have been able to do all that they have with genomes, but this book did enhance my understanding of the scientific process of genetic modification. It also refreshed my memory on some of the legal battles surrounding GM foods and scientific studies that have been done on these foods.

Overall, I found the book to be readable and well-researched.

A few opinions (mostly on the issues rather than the book....)

Since GM foods are considered "substantially equivalent" to their non-GM counterparts, there is no compulsory testing by U.S. regulatory agencies. Companies that manufacture genetically modified seeds are responsible for testing for safety themselves before releasing them to the public. I'm not saying GM foods are inherently unsafe, but should we really trust corporations to do their own testing?

The whole patenting of genetic materials/seeds/living things bothers me. I am not completely up to date on current legal issues regarding patents on genetic material and since this book has been published several of more ridiculous patents have been revoked, but there still seem to be some problems.

Human ingenuity blows my mind. People can be really, really smart. They can also be really, really greedy, and therein lies the problem. If only scientists could just be scientists and learn, innovate, and discover without interference from big money.

But alas, that is not the world we live in.

It is hard to know the long term consequences of our actions as a society. It is impossible to tell in what direction science will take us. The genes we modify today may come back to haunt us twenty years. Or they may save us from mass starvation. Time will tell. I realize this science could hold a lot of promise. I just wish we'd proceed with a little more caution and a lot less greed.

Diego says

Good book

I was one of those persons that believed GM food was particularly bad. Now I know what went wrong. Misinformation, failing to explain etc

Mic says

This is a really excellent book. Before I bought it I remember reading an Amazon.com review that more or less said this book was a shill for corporate agribusiness, but I don't agree at all. Peter Pringle seems to have presented the pertinent issues, important events, and opinions around them in an informative, unbiased manner, which I really appreciate.

A lot of the events covered in this book were also covered in one of my favorite documentaries, *The Future of Food*, and it was interesting to see them in a more detailed medium.

Next I'm reading the other book of the same title. I'm interested to see how and if they handle the same key events and issues differently.

Similarly, it was interesting to have read this book shortly after Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, particularly his description of man's slow domestication of edible plants. Genetic tinkering certainly has its questions and risks, but when the history of applied agriculture is considered it's pretty comical to hear anyone create this false dichotomy of traditional farming as "natural" and modern bioengineering as "unnatural".

Litbitch says

Excellent. I don't understand why I thought it was dull and put it aside when I started reading it a few years ago. Pringle has this really interesting style of seeming to mock the argument, credentials, or public statements of a certain advocate or group, then delving into their point of view to the extent that it becomes either reasonable or deeply flawed - but you can't usually tell which it's going to be when you start reading about them. It's rather blatant skepticism, and once I got used to it (What? You're ripping on Vandana Shiva? Oh ... wait ... you're ... not...?), I really enjoyed it.

Content-wise, probably the best and most even and thorough analysis of the debate over genetically modified food that I've read. Pringle is unafraid to alternate praise and criticize of both sides (and everyone in between) and gives a great layman's explanation of the science behind transgenic procedures and results. I've studied this issue in some depth, and would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the GM debate, or food evolution, farming, and international trade issues in general.

Andy says

The kind of "argument" I like: Well-researched and impartial.

Biotech companies will tell you that antibiotech people are uninformed Luddite nutjobs. Antibiotech people will tell you that biotech companies are greedy, heartless Malthusians. This book shows you how both sides are wrong -- about their opposition and themselves.

Warning: This book will have you asking the planet to stop spinning for a minute so you can get off.

Nick says

Have you eaten genetically modified food? If you're American, yes. Yet how much do we actually know about this new technology. This book is fair and unbiased. The author points out faults on both sides as to why there is so much FUD about them. I learned a lot about it's history and where we'll go from here.

Katie says

The author presents an "unbiased" discussion of genetically modified crops. He does a fairly good job. Sometimes his jumping back and forth across an issue is confusing, but he tries not to stay too long on any one side. Despite (or perhaps because of) his unbiased opinion there is much in here that should concern the public about the safety of GM crops, although the author still holds out hope that GM crops can help feed the world. This book isn't as extensive or well researched as "The World According to Monsanto" but it is much shorter and more readable for the general public.

Brianne says

Expanded on GMO crops - was a little out of date. Repeated things and expanded on things from the world according to Monsanto, however shed some light on a few new things I didn't know. The authors point of view was also rather interesting and refreshing.

Michelle Lensing says

This book does a great job at informing its reader of the pros and cons of GMOs. It really describes many different reasons why GMOs could be very harmful to us, but at the same time Pringle doesn't leave out how they could benefit us as well. Because he informs the reader on both sides to the argument, it is really left up to the reader to decided what they ultimately think about GMOs. This book is extremely informative; however, it can get boring to read through all of these somewhat scientific terms if you are not extremely interested in that.

Ashley says

This gives a well-balanced account of the many arguments on both sides of the GM debate. Its a relatively quick read and provides important background information on the subject. What I like most is that after

providing you with the "facts", as close as one can come, it leaves the reader to make his/her own decision.

Torrey says

The Book that I read for this assignment is called Food Inc. The author of this book is Peter Pringle. The book is about the food industry in the United States of America. Food Inc is 243 pages. A common name in my book is Monsanto. They are a corporation who specializes in GMO's (Genetically Modified Organisms).

In Chapter four, " A New Sort of Tomato" Peter talks about GMO Tomatoes. He speaks on how in the early days of bio- engineering, the petunia flower and tobacco leaves were the only two plants people bio-engineered. People often refer to GMO's as to cassette players because it plays info that feeds into a trans-genetic plant like a cassette. The only difference is that with GMO's, is that you cannot control what the gene player will play because there is no real control. Others worry that the new protein might turn the plants into either something useless or even worse which is toxic. Biotech companies even reduced the reality of GMO's. The evidence I have of this is a quote from the text. " Biotech companies minimized the scientific realities of making a transgenic plant"

In Chapter five, " The Battle for Basmati", Peter talks about Basmati Rice. Out of nowhere, young green shoots started appearing in the marshes or upland meadows of the continent of Asia. The folks suspected of being behind this are the nomads of Greater Punjab which is located in the foothills of the Himalaya mountains and tributary valleys of the Indus near Northern India and Pakistan. Basmati was always in demand. A Texas rice company called RiceTech Inc. claimed to have bred a new breed of basmati that was supposed to be superior to or better than Asian basmati rice. They began to sell it under the name Kasmati and American basmati under the brand Texmati. A person named Vandana Shiva called this " Biopiracy". India saw this as nothing more than a Texas company trying to rustle away another piece of Indian agriculture. The proof that I have is this quote " Biopiracy, cried Vandana Shiva".

In Chapter 7, " Anatomy of a poisoned butterfly", Peter talks about how the butterfly is endangered of being extinct. BT Corn came along in the spring of 1999. BT stand for Bacillus thuringiensis, which is a soil bacterium with a toxic producing gene. Cotton and potatoes also had this crap. Bt was designed to kill the European corn borer. But this causes problems for butterflies. " Bt toxin can harm butterflies and moths". The pollen grains containing the Bt toxin blow in the wind onto milkweed leaves. The larvae from the butterflies and of course the butterflies and moths eat the milkweed leaves.

To sum up the point of this book, GMO's are bad. They are not only bad for human health, but also for the health of animals, plants and other living things. Big evil corporations only want control over the food system, and money. They do not care about the environment, the health of wildlife and humanity. The only way to stop this, is to stop buying their products, and get to kick them out of the government. This book has a big impact on the audience because by knowing this information, you can improve human health, and the environment of our wonderful earth. These things are very important. The value will be lasting, at least as long as bio-engineering exists.

Bio-engineering is the act of producing GMO's.

Andrew Masters says

Food, Inc. is a book dedicated to revealing the truths in the battle over genetically-modified foods. Peter Pringle tells both the truths and lies that both sides have made, explaining in-depth as he goes. He explains different scenarios involving these genetically modified foods from around the world to truly give insight into the industry.

Personally I enjoyed Food, Inc. I thought it was very helpful in clearing up questions that may arise involving genetically-modified foods. It gave me a true look into the food industry and highlighted both truths and lies about it.

Graham says

I found the lack of organization in this book its greatest downfall. The book subtitle "Mendel to Monsanto -- The Promises and Perils of the Biotech Harvest" would make it seem that it traces a scientific history beginning with Mendel and ending with Monsanto, though there is somewhat of a coherent connection made in this book, the chronology is extremely skewed. Each chapter is a jumble of the same and the chapter titles are only vaguely related to the chapter content. To write a book this way the author must have informative chapter titles that explain what the chapter is about. "Of Cauliflower, Potatoes, and Snowdrops" tells me nothing, neither does "Anatomy of a Poisoned Butterfly" or "The Cornfield of Oaxaca". If this is the artful approach any author wishes to pursue, at least have an introduction to each chapter to inform the reader about what he or she is about to read. Instead, many of the chapters begin with a story, and then trail off into a mess of scientific, legal, political, and public relations information.

The author states that he is trying to occupy some middle ground in the GMO debate, which I think falls on its face immediately. The only way Pringle can get away with such a claim is because he doesn't state his personal conviction, though perhaps that's what he was attempting with his Malthusian discussion in the final chapter. You are either in favour or you are not. As soon as you claim to think there is some potential in GMOs for one end or another and that there should be tests conducted toward this end, you are in favour, though more rationally so than one forging ahead without precaution. On the matter of organization, I will try to offer some advice. For the sake of being concise and organized in the conveying of the two ideologues, begin in the part one of the book by discussing the actions, ideas, and words of the "in favour" camp. Discuss what the industry, the farmers, the scientists (include experimental and practical results), activists, politicians, countries people, whoever, are saying in favour of GMOs. Then in the next part discuss what those not in favour are saying. What are the industries, farmers, scientists, activists, politicians, and whoever else, saying about GMOs. Why don't these people like them? Then in the concluding third part, analyze the two sides which are in the first two parts and formulate what a middle ground might look and feel like, though as I already stated, it's impossible to be in the middle here. Such a book would be a very interesting read.

I was happy to read the name of Vandana Shiva in "Food, Inc.", though Pringle discusses her wardrobe in greater detail than her philosophical perspectives. I'm singling her out because I had just finished reading "The Violence of the Green Revolution" the day before I started reading "Food, Inc." and I believe that her approach to agriculture is not one to be ignored. She believes that food should be grown and consumed locally and nations should be self reliant. That's not something that global capitalists like to hear. The under representation of Vandana Shiva has made me question the accuracy of the other things reported in this

book.

Anyway, there is no original research in this book. There isn't much analysis of the social implications of biotechnology other than "it might be able to feed the world, if only biotech corporations would be open with the public and the government would regulate the industry properly". So if you're looking for a mess of corporate PR, quotes from activists, scientists, and politicians, with some dry scientific explanations tossed in wherever the author saw appropriate, read this book. Oh, right, activists aren't concerned about people in the "developing" world either. They only care about their health and safety, and the flavour of their food.

It seems like the author had a lot of hope in writing an excellent book, but just couldn't get things organized. Maybe the film is better. By the by, the book cover says "with an updated introduction and afterward", but there isn't an afterward.

Nicko says

Comprehensively covers a complex subject in an understandable and engaging way.

This is a book to own. It will change your perspective on food: where you buy it, what you buy and why. Not necessarily an 'alarmist' type of book. Just one that opens your eyes to the history of industrialized food production and where it is headed. A sustainable food supply should be at least of some importance to most people.

Consider some points in the book:

- insecticide and herbicide companies have bought out the majority of seed companies,
- these companies are genetically modifying the seeds and patenting them,
- today just a few companies own the rights to the majority of seeds used for farm-grown products.

Large corporations (i.e., Monsanto) are winning lawsuits against much smaller farmers because genetically modified seed that is patented has blown onto their farms. The book conveys somewhat one-sidedly and briefly the history of food, but focuses mainly on the court cases and the how the individual farmers were affected by them.
