Playing god in the garden-planting

Scratching the Biotech Itch Monsanto Chemicals aggressive moves to dominate the world of biotechnology can be a little unsettling. The article " Playing God in the Garden" by Michael Pollan points out a multitude of reasons to be wary of the new class of genetically engineered foods. However, Americans love the wide selection of fruits and vegetables available at the supermarket. We have no second thoughts about paying a lower percentage of our income for food than just about anywhere else in the world. To feed the billions of people here and around the world requires some practical applications of our technologies. Biotechnology foods may be unnerving to some, but in our quest to feed the world at an affordable cost we need to make some trade offs. Pollans article is a good common sense look at the subject. Nothing comes without a risk, but companies and investors that take that risk need to know that they are making a bet on their own reputation and their financial future.

First of all, Bio-Toxin potatoes are not as unsafe as some of the chemicals used in conventional food products. With every new innovation in pest or weed management, there comes a risk of one-day discovering a long-term health effect. The age of chemicals introduced Alar, DDT, and Heptachlor as a miracle application that would produce more food at a lower cost. They were discovered to be extremely harmful to the ecology of our planet as well as our personal health. Socially, we reversed our direction and the industry developed safer products.

Unlike the past, Monsanto needs to put its money where its mouth is in regards to its belief that the new genetically engineering approach is safe. Of course, when weve seen the results of tobacco, asbestos, and Enron, there are few reasons to trust a multi-national conglomeration with their reach.

The public needs to hold Monsanto and the scores of other biotechnology companies financially and socially responsible for their products. The FDA and the EPA have passed the ball back and forth but have refused to get involved in the game. They have left it to the companies and they and their investors need to be aware that they will be held accountable.

Past genetic engineering was slow and took generations to produce any results. 50 years ago, plant geneticists were crossing drought resistant soybeans with a variety that was resistant to mold. After generations of selection, they had a new variety that had the mold resistant gene. Today, this is done in a petri dish in a fraction of the time. There is little difference in the two processes. Modern genetic technology benefits from speed and flexibility. It also benefits from control and application. A genetic monster can be recognized and eradicated as quickly as it can be developed.

Biotechnology foods are here to stay. Bugs evolve, products evolve, and class action lawyers procreate. This is the only practical approach to feeding the world at an affordable cost. Organic farming will continue to be available as a choice at a premium price, but most consumers are cost conscious. The issue is in the hands of society. Socially and financially responsible companies will be less likely to risk disaster than the immune firms of the past were. The public needs to be willing to become aware and be vocal in their insistence that biotech companies are held accountable for their products.

Works Consulted

Pollan, Michael. " Playing God in the Garden." New York Times Magazine 1998. 19 Feb. 2007 .