

Genetically Modified Crops Grown For 20 Years In Australia

We haven't turned into mutants yet.

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Bloomberg via Getty Images

Is this cotton GM? You'll never know.

Organic farming and genetic modification may not seem like a natural fit, but an independent researcher says a 20-year safety track record should be trusted by everyone, including organic farmers.

Peak industry organisation CropLife Australia commissioned a report into the impact of genetically modified (GM) crops in Australia since their introduction in 1996 showing a 23 percent reduction in herbicide and insecticide use.

The [report by agricultural researchers PG Economics](#) also found the more efficient, higher yield GM crops increased farmer incomes by \$1.37 billion, and lowered carbon emissions by 71.5 million kg.



Bloomberg via Getty Images You can't tell but this cotton being harvested in Narrabri, NSW is GM.

Curtin University agriculture biotechnology professor Michael Jones told The Huffington Post Australia the report was the first in-depth look into GM impacts in Australia and should end the debate about its safety.

"There were initially concerns about GM creating increased allergens or super weeds but now that we've got 20 years of scientific investigation we should be comfortable calling it safe," Jones told HuffPost Australia.

"I think the organic farming industry should see GM as perfect, organic crops. Really, all the food we eat is GM, that's what traditional plant breeding and animal breeding is -- it just takes a big longer."

Jones, who said he'd never received funding from Monsanto, said the everyday person was interacting with GM products daily and fear mongering about the potential for it to cause increased cancer rates or destroy native plants never eventuated.

shutterstock I love a good luxurious GM cotton sheet set.

"Virtually all the cotton we grow in Australia is GM and all the cotton we import from places like Pakistan and India is pretty much GM also.

"If you go into Myer and you buy sheets for your bed or cotton underwear, it's all from GM cotton.

"Similarly if go down to Fremantle for fish and chips, chances are it's fried in GM cottonseed oil.

"Then we grow almost no soybean and very little maize and the countries we import from about 90 percent GM.

"We've been eating GM for a very long time and it's no problem."

Yet GM Free Australia Alliance spokesperson Jessica Harrison told news.com.au that Australians felt they didn't believe genetic modification was proven safe and many [didn't know whether their processed food had GM ingredients in it](#).

"Corn is 90 per cent GM in the U.S, and if that's used in Australian-manufactured biscuits or bread, no labelling is required," Harrison said. "The government doesn't believe we deserve to know."

Emeritus professor of public health and community medicine at the University of Sydney Stephen Leeder said the risks of GM food remained an open question.

"No one can say with confidence that it has no effect."

"A lot of GM crops are engineered to tolerate 10 times the normal level of herbicides. Those herbicides have been demonstrated to be carcinogenic. Resistance is bred into the weeds so you need new herbicides or higher doses to keep them at bay," he told [news.com.au](#).

But there may be a broader environmental benefit from GM crops compared to conventional farming.

Monsanto Australia New Zealand managing director Tony May told HuffPost Australia he was especially proud of the reduction in chemicals needed for GM crops.

"Reduction in pesticide use is an issue that's very close to my heart because came from a cotton farming background. To reduce amount of pesticides is quite amazing because it cuts down on farmer exposure and also the amount going into the environment."

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2016/06/13/genetically-modified-crops-grown-for-20-years-in-australia/>