

VOA Special English Agriculture Report

GENETIC ENGINEERING REPORT

This is Bill White with the VOA Special English Agriculture Report.

Earlier this month, a committee of the National Academy of Sciences released a report that examines the safety of crops made with genetic engineering. The report is expected to influence the debate in the United States about the products of genetic engineering. Genetic engineering is the technology of changing the genes of living things.

The National Academy of Sciences is a private group established by Congress more than 100 years ago. Congress directed the Academy to advise government officials about science and technology.

The new report examines the safety of plants treated with special genes to resist insects and disease. Last year, farmers planted more than 30 million hectares of genetically-engineered crops in the United States.

The committee that wrote the report said it found no evidence suggesting any food being sold now is unsafe to eat because of genetic changes. However, it urged American officials responsible for such crops to do more to protect public health and the environment.

The report notes that few of these crops have been shown to cause health or environmental problems. However, it said changes in the treated plants should be closely watched. And, it called for improved methods for identifying genes that could cause harmful reactions in humans.

The scientists examined environmental concerns, including the idea that treated plants could influence other organisms. They proposed more studies to identify rates at which insect-resistant genes might spread and to develop methods to decrease the spread.

The report also called for improvements in the way the government supervises genetic engineering. Committee chairman Perry Adkisson says public acceptance of genetically-engineered foods depends on independent testing and government rules. He said the testing and rules must be complete and based on accepted scientific ideas.

A trade group representing more than 900 companies and research centers praised the findings. A spokesman said the report confirms that genetically-engineered foods are safe. However, environmental and other groups were more critical. They said some of the people who wrote the report have close ties to the biotechnology industry.

This VOA Special English Agriculture Report was written by George Grow. This is Bill White.

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