

Food biotechnology: real world challenges

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Genetically modified crops have been widely adopted by American farmers. In spite of their use in the United States, the European Union (EU) imposed a 6-year freeze (1998–2004) on growing and importing transgenic crops.

In 2002, transgenic food aid to African nations was rejected by the recipient governments. The EU's stand on agricultural biotechnology no doubt contributed to this decision.

Lori Unruh Snyder, Department of Agronomy, Purdue University, along with others, shares how to teach using this discussion-based scenario in the 2008 *Journal of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Education*.

According to Snyder, "First we provide an unbiased 'background' lecture outlining the issues. Students see how this incident shows conflict between those affected and those who write public policy. We present issues from all sides of the debate and encourage both small group and entire class discussion."

The exercise strengthened student critical thinking skills and helped students understand how people perceive biotechnology around the world. Students also evaluated how regional opinions can impact the rest of the world, and debated the pros and cons of biotechnology as viewed by the United States, Europe, Africa, and the World Trade Organization.

Teaching critical thinking can be an effective way to enhance students' abilities in specific content areas.

"This is important in disciplines where the subject matter is difficult, fraught with controversy, or raises complex sociological, environmental, and political issues," says Snyder.

Source: American Society of Agronomy

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