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Review of: *Eat Your Genes: How Genetically Modified Food Is Entering Our Diet* (Stephen Nottingham ed.)

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Abstract

Review of the book: "Eat Your Genes: How Genetically Modified Food Is Entering Our Diet," by Stephen Nottingham, (St. Martin's Press 1999). Introduction, Glossary, Bibliography, Index. ISBN 1-85649-578-7 [212 pp. \$17.95. Softbound, St. Martin's Press, Inc., New York, NY 10010].

Keywords

GMOs, food, crops, agriculture

Stephen Nottingham *Eat Your Genes: How Genetically Modified Food Is Entering Our Diet* (St. Martin's Press 1999). Introduction, Glossary, Bibliography, Index. ISBN 1-85649-578-7 [212 pp. \$17.95. Softbound, St. Martin's Press, Inc., New York, NY 10010].

The title of *Eat Your Genes: How Genetically Modified Food Is Entering Our Diet* evokes the flavor and content of the book. The author, Stephen Nottingham, is a crop protection biologist who has written several books relating to genetic engineering, ecology, and popular culture.¹ While far from a polemic, *Eat Your Genes* conveys Nottingham's view that the first generation of genetically modified foods served the interests of production agriculture and the agricultural chemical industry, to the exclusion of consumer interests in informed decision-making and the global interest in sustainable agriculture. In particular, Nottingham expresses concern with the lack of a labeling requirement for genetically modified foods and the focus of the agricultural industry on producing foods that enhance profits without conferring benefits to the environment, to consumers, or to the sustainable agriculture movement.

As indicated in the book's introduction, the text and examples are appropriate for general readers wanting to understand issues relating to genetic engineering and food production.² A glossary in the back clarifies the technical terms used throughout the text. Those wanting to pursue further research can use each chapter's footnotes and the lengthy bibliography at the end.

With each of the book's fifteen chapters addressing a different aspect of the production, marketing, and regulation of genetically modified foods, the book meets its promise of explaining "how and why genetically modified food suddenly became part of our diet" and the "wider implications of genetic engineering for countries worldwide."³ Chapter 1 introduces the scientific and technical

¹ See Stephen Nottingham's Homepage, available at <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Stephen_Nottingham/homepage.htm> (last updated Nov. 2001).

² See *id.*

³ Stephen Nottingham, *Eat Your Genes: How Genetically Modified Food Is Entering Our Diet* vii-ix (Univ. of Cape Town Press 1999).

procedures used in genetic modification of foods and contrasts the process with age-old plant and animal breeding techniques. Other chapters examine such topics as how the United States and European Union regulate genetically modified foods and how public opinion regarding such foods is evolving. A summary of the implications of intellectual property law on genetically modified food is included in the book. The book concludes with a critique of the utility of the first generation of genetically modified food — and indeed, the entire Green Revolution — for the developing world and with a discussion of the prospects of using genetically modified foods in the future to address the needs of consumers around the world.

The book's principal drawback relates to its 1998 publication date, a relatively long time ago in the rapidly changing world of genetic engineering and public policy. Legislative initiatives, industry changes, and technical developments that have occurred since 1998 are beyond the book's scope. For example, the book lacks a discussion of so-called golden rice, a vitamin A enriched genetically modified rice, recently highlighted in the popular press as a food designed to address malnutrition.⁴ Such foods addressing consumer needs, rather than the exigencies and convenience of production agriculture, may represent the next generation of genetic engineering of what we eat.

Furthermore, the book's spotlight on public policy of and public reaction to genetically modified foods in the United States and European Union may suggest that few debates relating to such foods have occurred elsewhere in the world. Global conferences in countries including Egypt and Thailand have been held addressing the issues since the publication of the book.⁵

These shortcomings are relatively minor and are inevitably the product of publishing a piece on a developing field in its early phase. In

⁴ See generally J. Madeleine Nash, *Grains of Hope*, 156 *Time* 39 (July 31, 2000).

⁵ See e.g. Sacha Shivdasani, *Biotechnology: Giving a Voice to the Developing World*, *Earth Times with Conference News Daily* (Sept. 11, 2001), available at <http://www.earthtimes.org/sep/foodsecuritybiotechnologysep11_01htm> (conference entitled "Biotechnology and Sustainable Development: Voices of the South and North" held in Alexandria, Egypt, Oct. 15-17, 2001) (last accessed Nov. 22, 2001); Ling Wu Kong, *Genetically Modified Foods Discussed at the New Biotechnology Food Conference*, *Earth Times with Conference News Daily* (July 12, 2001), available at <http://www.earthtimes.org/jul/foodsecuritygeneticallyjul12_01.htm> (conference entitled "New Biotechnology Food and Crops: Science, Safety and Society" held in Bangkok, Thailand, July 10-12, 2001).

general, the book is a valuable, readable resource for those seeking an introduction to the technology, industry, practices, legal standards, and politics of the production and marketing of genetically modified foods.

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