

U.S.

Stop Bashing G.M.O. Foods, More Than 100 Nobel Laureates Say

By NIRAJ CHOKSHI JUNE 30, 2016

More than 100 Nobel laureates have a message for Greenpeace: Quit the G.M.O.-bashing.

Genetically modified organisms and foods are a safe way to meet the demands of a ballooning global population, the 109 laureates wrote in a letter posted online and officially unveiled at a news conference on Thursday in Washington, D.C.

Opponents, they say, are standing in the way of getting nutritious food to those who need it.

“Greenpeace has spearheaded opposition to Golden Rice, which has the potential to reduce or eliminate much of the death and disease caused by a vitamin A deficiency (VAD), which has the greatest impact on the poorest people in Africa and Southeast Asia,” the laureates wrote in the letter.

Proponents of genetically modified foods such as Golden Rice, which contains genes from corn and a bacterium, argue that they are efficient vehicles for needed nutrients. Opponents fear that foods whose genes are manipulated in ways that do not naturally occur might contaminate existing crops. And, they say, the debate distracts from the only guaranteed solution to malnutrition: promoting diverse, healthy diets.

“Corporations are overhyping ‘Golden’ rice to pave the way for global approval of other more profitable genetically engineered crops,” Wilhelmina Pelegrina, a campaigner with Greenpeace Southeast Asia, said in a statement. “This costly

experiment has failed to produce results for the last 20 years and diverted attention from methods that already work.”

Richard J. Roberts, one of two winners of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, spearheaded the letter-writing effort to set the record straight.

“There’s been a tremendous amount of misinformation being put out by Greenpeace,” he said. Some plant scientists have been “attacked so fiercely” over their views that they’ve gone silent, Dr. Roberts said.

In the letter, the laureates — all but 10 of whom earned their prizes in the fields of physics, chemistry or medicine — contend that G.M.O.s have consistently been found to be safe. The Washington Post covered the group’s efforts on Wednesday.

“Scientific and regulatory agencies around the world have repeatedly and consistently found crops and foods improved through biotechnology to be as safe as, if not safer than those derived from any other method of production,” the group of laureates wrote. “There has never been a single confirmed case of a negative health outcome for humans or animals from their consumption. Their environmental impacts have been shown repeatedly to be less damaging to the environment, and a boon to global biodiversity.”

In a report released in May, the influential National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine found that genetically engineered crops appear to be generally safe to eat and safe for the environment. It resisted broad proclamations, however, calling such sweeping statements “problematic” because of a variety of factors that affect such an analysis.

Consumers Union, a policy division of the nonprofit Consumer Reports, has approached the issue with caution, calling for labeling and federal scrutiny to better understand foods that contain genetically modified components.

In 2014, the Pew Research Center found an enormous gap between the public and scientists on the issue. Just 37 percent of adults in the United States said genetically modified foods were safe to eat, while 88 percent of scientists connected to the American Association for the Advancement of Science said the

same.

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