

## Genetically Modified Crops for Global Health

Rama Chowdhary\*

Department of Bio Technology, Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, Bhubaneswar, India

### ABOUT THE STUDY

Genetically Modified (GM) crops have emerged as a significant innovation in agriculture, offering the potential to address global food security challenges, reduce pesticide use, and enhance crop resilience. However, the adoption and cultivation of GM crops have raised concerns about their impact on global health, the environment, and socio-economic aspects. In this article, will examine the global health implications of GM crops, exploring both their potential benefits and associated risks.

### The promise of GM crops for global health

**Increased crop yields:** One of the primary objectives of GM crop development is to increase agricultural productivity. By introducing genes that confer resistance to pests, diseases, and adverse environmental conditions, GM crops have the potential to yield higher harvests. This can contribute to global food security and reduce the risk of hunger and malnutrition.

**Reduced pesticide use:** GM crops engineered to resist specific pests or diseases can reduce the need for chemical pesticides. This not only minimizes the health risks associated with pesticide exposure but also benefits the environment by decreasing chemical runoff into water sources.

**Enhanced nutritional content:** GM crops can be designed to have improved nutritional profiles. For instance, bio fortified GM crops with higher levels of essential nutrients, such as vitamin A, iron, or zinc, can address specific micronutrient deficiencies in populations, reducing the prevalence of associated health problems.

**Drought and salinity tolerance:** Genetic modification can confer tolerance to drought and salinity in crops, helping to maintain agricultural productivity in regions prone to water scarcity. This is particularly important for ensuring a stable food supply in the face of climate change.

**Disease resistance:** GM crops can be engineered to resist specific plant diseases, reducing crop losses and the need for chemical fungicides. This contributes to the sustainability of agriculture while minimizing potential health risks from pesticide exposure.

**Reduced aflatoxin contamination:** Aflatoxins, toxic compounds produced by certain molds, can contaminate crops such as maize, peanuts, and cottonseed, posing serious health risks when consumed. GM crops have been developed to resist aflatoxin-producing molds, reducing aflatoxin contamination in food.

### Risks and concerns

**Allergenicity:** The introduction of novel proteins in GM crops raises concerns about potential allergenicity. While rigorous safety assessments are conducted before commercialization, ongoing monitoring is essential to identify any unexpected allergic reactions.

**Environmental concerns:** GM crops may have unintended ecological consequences, such as the development of resistance in target pests, the emergence of super weeds, or harm to non-target organisms. These issues can indirectly impact global health by disrupting ecosystems and natural food chains.

**Socio-economic factors:** The adoption of GM crops can have socio-economic implications for farmers, particularly in developing countries. Intellectual property rights, seed costs, and dependence on multinational biotechnology companies can affect the livelihoods of small-scale farmers.

**Antibiotic resistance marker genes:** Some GM crops have incorporated antibiotic resistance marker genes during their development. While these genes are not present in the final food product, there are concerns that they could contribute to antibiotic resistance in bacteria if transferred through horizontal gene transfer.

**Loss of biodiversity:** The widespread cultivation of GM monocultures may contribute to the loss of biodiversity as it often involves replacing diverse crop varieties with a single GM cultivar. Reduced biodiversity can have implications for food security and ecosystem health.

### Global health considerations

**Addressing malnutrition:** GM crops have the potential to address malnutrition by providing nutrient-fortified varieties that can combat specific deficiencies in various regions. Golden Rice,

**Correspondence to:** Rama Chowdhary, Department of Bio Technology, Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, Bhubaneswar, India, E-mail: ramaramachram@gmail.com

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for example, is engineered to contain pro vitamin A, which can help combat vitamin “A” deficiency, a major global health concern.

**Reducing pesticide-related health risks:** By reducing the need for chemical pesticides, GM crops can lower the risks of acute and chronic health problems associated with pesticide exposure, including poisoning, developmental issues, and certain cancers.

**Promoting sustainable agriculture:** Sustainable agricultural practices, including the use of GM crops, can enhance soil health, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote long-term food security, all of which have positive implications for global health and environmental sustainability.

**Combating foodborne toxins:** GM crops with reduced susceptibility to pests and diseases can minimize the need for fungicides and other chemicals, reducing the risk of foodborne toxins like aflatoxins and mycotoxins that can pose severe health risks.

**Climate resilience:** GM crops engineered for climate resilience can contribute to global health by helping maintain food production in regions susceptible to climate-related disasters, such as droughts and flooding.

Genetically modified crops have the potential to play a significant role in addressing global health challenges, particularly in the areas of food security, malnutrition, and pesticide-related health risks. However, the adoption and management of GM crops must be approached cautiously to mitigate potential risks to human health, the environment, and socio-economic factors. Ongoing research, robust safety assessments, transparent labeling, and strong regulatory oversight are essential to harness the benefits of GM crops while minimizing their potential adverse effects. Ultimately, the responsible development and use of GM crops can contribute to improved global health outcomes by providing more resilient, nutritious, and sustainable food sources.