

Going Bananas

A banana is probably the most innocent of all fruits. Peel it, eat it, forget it. Now think! What about a banana memory pill (or a banana with memory enhancing traits)? Eat a banana and remember your answers better! Better still would be a chicken pox banana or a hepatitis banana. No more pricks! Just have a banana. And those horrible anti biotics could be done away with. Wow! this sounds really great. But all is not honky dory in banana kingdom. Banana is major produce of many small low income countries. Their economy depends on banana export to rich industrialised countries. Once bananas get 'created' in labs, their economy would plunge because most of this lab and research technology is limited to the three or four very rich countries of the world. As an example, swallow this: United Brands, an US-based company has about two-thirds of the different species of banana gene in its gene bank!

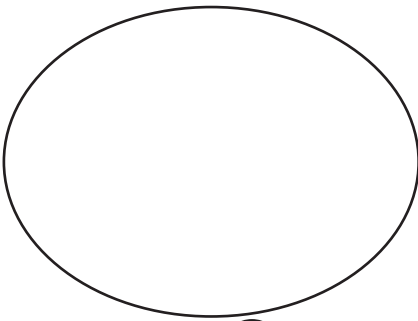
Now that you know quite a bit about bananas, try guessing what each of the following people are thinking.



Farmer from low-income country



Customer/consumer



GM Banana
Guaranteed to cure
your common cold

Farmer from high-income country



ILLUSTRATIONS: KUMAR



CEO of GMO company

Some questions to help you think...

- ❖ Are scientists right in tampering with genetic codes?
- ❖ Possible effects of GMOs on environment?
- ❖ Will this encourage growing of only the special GM bananas? Effect on local farmers in low-income countries?
- ❖ Were local people ever consulted before collection of the different gene species? Do they know why these are being collected?
- ❖ Should the local people from whose land these various types of bananas originated get a share of the profits made by these companies? Will they?

True or False: Ask your teacher to help you with these. Tick ✓ for True and ✗ for false.

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| 1) To meet the world food crisis we have to produce genetically modified crops. <input type="checkbox"/> | 6) Rich countries do not control all the trade of GMOs. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2) Persons who have been harmed by any adverse effects of LMOs cannot sue the company that produced the product. <input type="checkbox"/> | 7) India has very strong laws to protect users of GMO products. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3) Pests do not get resistant to the toxins produced by the GM crops. <input type="checkbox"/> | 8) Forests of GMO trees cannot be developed. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4) GMOs are organisms in which a desired trait or characteristic is inserted into a gene. This is done not by the natural process of pollination, but in labs. <input type="checkbox"/> | 9) Global Biotech Business is controlled by 15 major corporations of the world. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5) By modifying genes we can induce vaccines in fruits. <input type="checkbox"/> | 10) GMOs are beneficial for the poor as the profits of the trade is always shared by the company that makes these changes in its labs and the people who own the various types of crops that are being modified. <input type="checkbox"/> |