

# Designer foods. How safe?

## Magic Inc...

Food on our plates has never been so controversial. Agricultural zones are today hot spots of pitched battles between conventional breeders and genetic modifiers.

Eight hundred million people today do not get enough food as they do not have the purchasing power. The world food production apparently is enough to meet everyone's need. By the year 2050 with 9 billion (3 billion more than today) to feed, is new technology imperative? Will waving the magical wand of genetic engineering and modification solve the world's food problem? Let's take a look at some options.

Scene 1- A futuristic farm. Six-storied high in a rich, developed country. A farm, where one need not touch soil or hay or for that matter dung. Everything is mechanised. Each farm produces enough to feed a quarter of a million. Fat livestock.

Food coming out of these 'food factories' are Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO). They have longer shelf life and are hygienically packed and of course contain ample nutrients. The animals are genetically modified too. Sure cure to all ailments. So, each Kalahandi and Somalia can have such a farm and no food problems at all! Is that what you think? The GMO conglomerates think otherwise. 98 per cent of the GMO companies present today are in just three countries, of which 68% are in US, earning more than the gross national product of the countries importing their produce. The products, in an effort to promote exports, can be so low-priced that local farms in developing countries can become obsolete.

Scene 2 - Economically viable small farms selling naturally grown agri-products each day in the local market, creating a chain of employment. The food is healthy. The economy is sustainable. Again is this the answer? What about the size of these vegetables? What about self-life? What about rotting vegetables? Shrimati Shrilata wrinkles up her nose. Her mother-in-law reminds her of the mango varieties they get from their village. No lab techniques used.

Today, with transnationals pushing products and governments buckling down to their bullying tactics will small farmers give up farming?

The battle of the genes and genies has begun...



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## In this issue:

- ▶ What are GMOs
- ▶ Big business of biotech
- ▶ Suspicious consumers
- ▶ Controlling the genie

- Global biotech research is in control of 15 major corporations, 13 of which are North American. They are known as the Miami Group

- Small biodiverse farms can produce a lot more food than large monocultres farms. Producing different types of crops by rotation helps prevent drought and also keeps the soil nourished with its nutrients.

- According to the Department of Biotechnology, the demand for GMOs in India was US\$ 1850 million in the year 2000