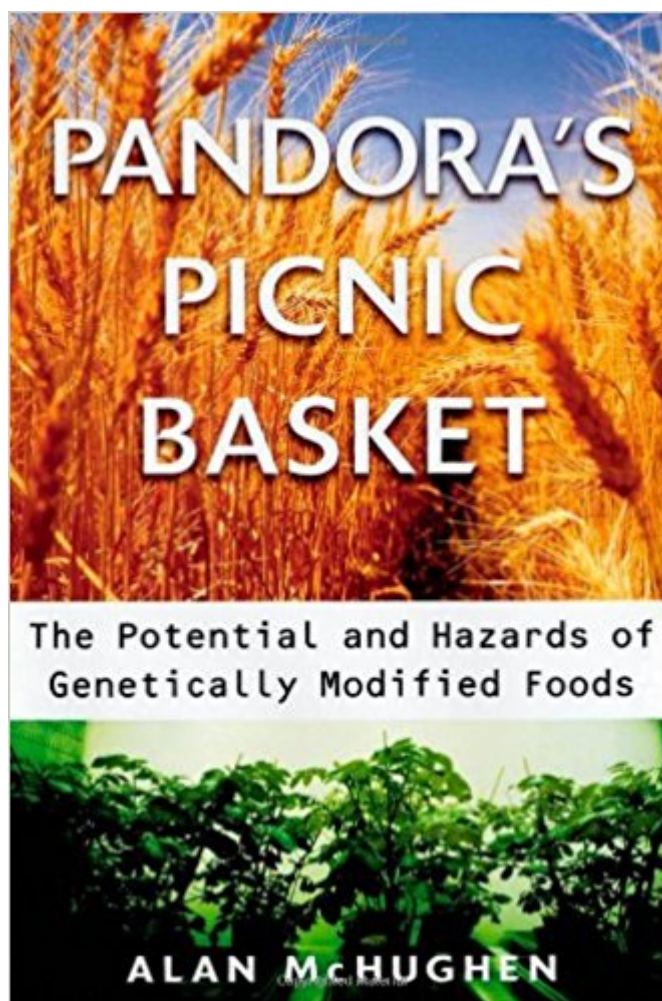


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Pandora's Picnic Basket: The Potential And Hazards Of Genetically Modified Foods



Synopsis

Did you know that there are fish genes in some tomatoes? That Brazil nut genes in soybeans can result in potentially lethal allergic reactions? That rapeseed plants bred to be resistant to herbicides could become uncontrollable superweeds? Genetically modified foods do pose real risks, and in recent years they have become the focus of a pitched battle between scientists, entrepreneurs, consumer advocates, and environmentalists. Yet despite the great heat generated by the debate, there is very little real information on the subject, either about the technologies in use or about the regulatory processes established to protect us from potentially dangerous products. Pandora's Picnic Basket explains, in clear and direct language, the technologies underlying genetically modified food, comparing them with other "natural" methods of plant breeding and production. Researcher Alan McHughen evaluates the safeguards in place from regulators around the world and asks whether these are sufficient. In particular, he examines the question of labeling, held by some to be an obvious way to help protect consumers, and addresses the honesty and usefulness of some of these labels. Throughout the book, McHughen offers fair-minded, well-informed accounts of issues of real concern, particularly environmental issues, and he outlines ways in which consumers can avoid genetically modified food if they so choose. The author uses question-and-answer boxes to address key issues and real case histories to illustrate the development and regulation of genetically modified food. Genetically modified foods are increasingly available to the public. Pandora's Picnic Basket will help consumers make informed choices about this controversial technology.

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Customer Reviews

Throughout the developed world, debate is raging over the use of genetically modified (GM) food and food additives. This debate, Canadian agricultural scientist McHughen holds, is not well-informed. "Everyone, it seems, is concerned about GM food," he writes, "but most admit they don't really know much about it." This is especially true in North America, where millions of acres of GM crops are now produced and GM foods are widely consumed, although it is no less true of Europe, where production and consumption alike are comparatively low. McHughen recognizes that some of these concerns are well-founded, even if the discussion is not, and his book is a thoughtful examination of some of the basic scientific issues involved in whether genetic modification may turn out to yield harmful (or, conversely, beneficial) results. These issues, he goes on to say, are of two broad kinds: first, whether a GM product is safe for the environment, and whether it can be prevented from "escaping" into nature; and second, whether a GM product is safe for the animal or human consumer. His answers may not always please activists on either side of the issue, for he suggests that while in the main GM production is likely to be a good thing, particularly in areas of the world where agricultural yields are low, there may yet be unanticipated risks involved--especially because "nature has no plan for agricultural systems based on high chemical inputs and low biodiversity." --Gregory McNamee

Fulfilling his promise to teach rather than preach, McHughen opens with a discussion of the basics of genetic modification technology before putting this technology within the larger contexts of food and environmental safety, risk assessment, corporate operations, politics, and ethics. First learning the basics will require some effort on the part of many readers, but McHughen is convinced that the scientific concepts are not that difficult for ordinary, interested people to comprehend. This is a refreshing approach to a subject often treated by the media and others with sensationalism, wild speculations, and rumors of "Frankenfoods." McHughen's qualifications are outstanding. He is a senior research scientist at the University of Saskatchewan, chair of the International Biosafety Advisory Committee of the Genetics Society of Canada, and developer of his own genetically modified organism, linseed. His emphasis here is on the United States, Canada, Britain, and Europe. McHughen covers some of the same ground as Stephen Nottingham's *Eat Your Genes* (LJ 7/98), but he focuses more on the technology while Nottingham reports on industry, governmental, and regulatory developments. For public and academic libraries. DW

William H. Wiese, Iowa State

I found this book was an excellent survey of its subject. McHugen knows his stuff well and his descriptions from the point of view of somebody who was trying to develop a strain of flax at his university in Canada was excellent. He also seemed to have a good grasp of the UK and US situations as well. Unfortunately the book is a little dated as it was written in 2000 but his comments are often surprisingly up to date and his history sections are extremely good.

lots of science - good look at the facts which will not support the hype about modified foods!

This book is great. It is objective and gets down to the nitty gritty issues. After reading this book you will almost be an expert on this subject. This is absolutely no "hot-air" in this book. It provides solid facts, in a conversational manner so it is not dry.

I purchased this book because Mr. McHughen is an upcoming speaker for a group I'm in. As a genetic engineer, he does a good job of describing why the anti-GMO movement is often considered poorly informed. However, he completely avoids all the other very strong arguments against GMOs in agriculture, and even offers some rather sad examples of what he sees as future benefits. The tone, overall, felt whiny to me, focused on what the author seems to feel is over-regulation of GMO output products, where there is no cross-contamination potential (and he's partly right on that). But truly, you can't offer a book on GMO hazards and be taken at all seriously unless you offer a thorough discussion of the very real economic hazards, and perhaps more thoroughly embrace the potential, and real history, of unintended consequences in science.

It easier to destroy an atom instead a prejudice , stated in certain opportunity Albert Einstein.Are you anxious for knowing the advances about the genetically designed food? The public education will turn off the opposed voices and peregrine interpretations about the superstitions weaved around this new subject.Hughes affirms that sixty per cent of the processed aliments contain some trans genetic product and we have been consuming them without ulterior consequences .He points out two positive aspects behind this newness technique : Those improvements will help to mitigate the hunger in the world and reduce also, the ecological impact in the intensive agriculture .A reference reading which undoubtedly forms part of one additional consequence of the Third Wave existence .

When I wanted to learn more about GM, I looked for a book to read that was based on science, not on rhetoric from activists that have only preconceptions and no real understanding of science. That is why I chose this book. Alan McHughen is not only a scientist, but he has done research on GM plants. This gives him a unique perspective into the pros and cons of GM plants and the GM process. He does a good job of describing the science behind GM, which is essential to understand for anyone interested in GM. Then he goes on to describe the application of GM technology and current issues. He emphasizes that one should separate the process of GM from the products of GM; something that the media and activist groups rarely do, further clouding the issue. If you would like to learn facts about GM so that you can decide for yourself, then this book is for you.

My thoughts have been centered on Genetically Modified food for some time, so was delighted to discover Allan McHughen's book "The Potential and Hazards of Genetic Modified Foods' on .com. Living in S. Africa, we are very much aware of the shortage of food for large numbers of people on the African continent as well as in many other areas of the world. The need is not just bulk to ease the pangs of hunger, but food with high nutritional value. There is also a need for the scientific knowledge of how to grow proper food in carefully nourished ground. I do hope that the scientific value to the human race can outweigh the risk of any commercial gain, and that the people who's needs are the greatest, can benefit from the work being done.

The author Allen McHughen promises the reader an unbiased view on GM, especially the potential and hazards or risks associated with it. In the end however, he clearly explains the benefits, but belittles the REAL problems of GM which he avoids. It is a gross manipulation of the truth. He is funded by MONSANTO, a totally pro GM company whose products have ruined farmers in India. He calls all the hazards of GM mere myths - invented by the media. He fails to address any hazards and tells only half the truth. How can he provide an unbiased viewpoint when he has genetically modified food himself? If you read VERY carefully between the lines you will realize he contradicts himself several times. The uncaredful reader is easily swayed by his complex yet empty arguments into thinking that GM is only good and has no risks. It is just a book of lies!!

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