

Report says GMOs are safe for people, environment

In what has been touted as the most comprehensive review of genetically modified organisms ever carried out, the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine last week said again that there is no evidence that foods containing GMOs are dangerous to humans or animals, or that the crops hurt the environment.

Good news for farmers and consumers, bad news for opponents who have full faith in science only when science supports their bias.

The authors did no original research. Instead, they reviewed "more than 900 research and other publications, heard from 80 diverse speakers at three public meetings and 15 webinars, and read more than 700 comments from members of the public to broaden its understanding of issues surrounding GE crops."

In short, claims both pro and con were analyzed. The committee concluded "that no differences have been found that implicate a higher risk to human health safety from these GE foods than from their non-GE counterparts."

For two decades researchers have used genetic engineering to quickly introduce desired characteristics into plants. The technology makes possible the development of a wide variety of beneficial varieties. To date, the report notes, only insect- and herbicide-resistant varieties have been put into widespread commercial use.

The insect-resistant varieties incorporate genes from a soil bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) to give the plant a built-in, targeted insecticide. Herbicide-resistant plants — including Monsanto's "Roundup Ready" varieties so reviled by GMO opponents, allow plants to be treated with effective herbicides that would otherwise kill the crop.

Opponents claim Bt and Roundup Ready crops hurt the environment. Not so, says the report. In both cases, farmers using these varieties use fewer insecticides and herbicides than farmers growing conventional crops. There is no proof that the use of Bt varieties leads to less insect diversity.

Concerns that insects grow tolerant of Bt varieties and weeds develop resistance to glyphosate, while real, are overblown because they can be mitigated with an integrated pest management regime.

The report's conclusion: "Overall, the committee found no conclusive evidence of cause-and-effect relationships between GE crops and environmental problems."

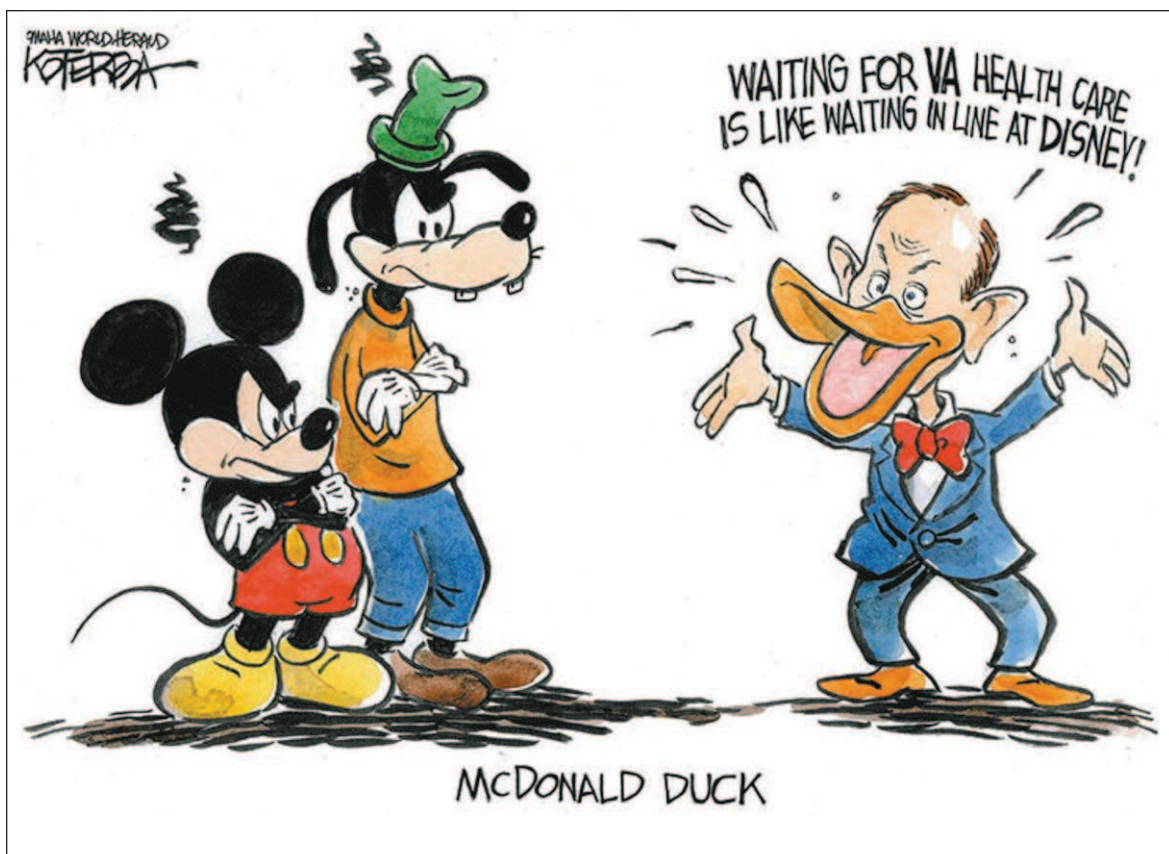
Opponents claim consuming food produced with genetically engineered ingredients lead to an increase in a host of ailments. But the committee found no differences in the patterns of those conditions in the United States and Canada, where GMO foods have been consumed for 20 years, and Great Britain and Western Europe, where consumption has been far less widespread.

Nor are animals harmed by eating feed made from GMO crops.

Opponents claim the introduction of GMOs has hurt farmers financially. While GMOs aren't a singular solution for all farming problems, and they aren't for every producer, farmers who have adopted GMO crops have generally reaped economic benefits, the report said.

No doubt this not the final word in a pitched and polarized debate. Read the report and other material at nas-sites.org/ge-crops/.

But the report should give farmers and consumers confidence that GMOs are safe. Twenty years of research and direct observation have not shown otherwise.



GUEST COMMENT

Oregon lawmakers should take cue from Florida's sunshine laws

By John Sepulvado
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

In elementary school, Franklin Weekley was diagnosed as "mentally retarded." He was slow to learn, but quick to act out on impulse. Teachers at his rural school were unequipped to get a handle on him. Weekley ended up spending much of his time at home. Unsupervised, he would often get in trouble.

Weekley fought with his siblings and raged at his neighbors. He was fascinated with fire and explosives, and was quick to run away in frustration. His parents — who were also developmentally disabled — hoped Weekley would grow out of it.

In 2001, that hope went up in smoke — literally — after Weekley set his family home on fire. The family lost everything, including their son, who was committed to a state-run mental facility as a result.

While in state care, Weekley vanished one day. The state agency in charge of his care would claim the developmentally disabled teenager — who had problems dressing himself — ran to Canada. But around 2004, an attorney heard about the disappearance. That attorney told a reporter, and soon after, the reporter filed public records request with the state agency in charge.

Those records showed that state contractors had found a body in an abandoned building on the property shortly after Weekley's disappearance.

The records showed the body was badly decomposed, but around the skeleton's hips was an elastic underwear band with "F. Weekley" written on the tag. A reporter's investigation found Weekley had run away into an abandoned building and fell down an elevator shaft, where he died.

Shortly after that story was

published, the state agreed to pay Franklin Weekley's parents \$1.3 million.

Strong public records laws have the ability to right wrongs, hold state workers — including politicians — accountable, and shine a light into the darkest recesses of government — like the bottom of a derelict elevator shaft on state-owned property. Public records laws help keep things honest.

That was the case in Florida, where Franklin Weekley died. Yet if that were to happen in Oregon, it's a good bet that Weekley's whereabouts would still be unknown. That's because a public records request for a case like Weekley's would almost certainly be obstructed by delays, exemption claims, and high costs.

"The current state of public records is poor to pathetic," said Willamette Week reporter Nigel Jaquiss. "The public agencies have no deadlines to require to public records request, so they often do so slowly and incompletely. Some public agencies use their ability to charge whatever they want in a punitive fashion."

Jaquiss, a Pulitzer Prize winner for Investigative Reporting, routinely files public records requests — and he said state agencies often find reasons to block requests because they "fear publication of a story that would be embarrassing."

As Jaquiss noted, there are no deadlines for Oregon agencies to respond to requests, nor are there limits to costs. Even if the agencies do respond, there are more than 500 exemptions to the state's public records laws. And while some of the exemptions serve the public good by protecting the victims of domestic abuse, or shielding state employee medical information, other exemptions include dog licenses, information about

boat accidents, and complaints filed by consumers about insurance companies, manufactured homes, and even the state's judges.

In comparison, Florida has four exemptions of public records, there are deadlines for when responses must be filed, and costs must correlate with work performed and be clearly outlined.

Legal challenges to this obstruction are often long and costly, and it creates an Oregon where only those with resources have access to transparency.

While the state's reporters have long complained about the state's open records laws, national research shows Oregon has some of the weakest open records rules in the country. According to the Center for Public Integrity, Oregon earns an "F" grade in the State Integrity Investigation, which measures "transparency and accountability grades for all 50 states."

The state also earns an "F" grade measuring the public's access to information, ranking 34th in the country. For context, Florida is ranked 17th (and neighboring California and Washington ranked 28th and 32nd, respectively).

The Oregon Territory Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists is calling on policymakers to reform Oregon's open record laws. Our membership believes that if it's good enough for Florida, it should be good enough for Oregon. We urge the public to support that reform.

And we encourage all journalists and voters to hold policymakers accountable until that reform is achieved.

John Sepulvado, OPB's *Weekend Edition* host and a member of the Oregon SPJ Sunshine Committee, wrote this on behalf of the Oregon Territory Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists board. Reach the chapter through spjoregon@gmail.com.



WHERE TO WRITE

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- **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: www.leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
- **State Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario** (District: 60), Room H-475, State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., Salem OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1460. Email: rep.cliffbentz@state.or.us. Website: www.leg.state.or.us/bentz/home.htm.
- **State Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R** — (District 30) Room S-223, State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-986-1950. Email: sen.tedferrioli@state.or.us. Email: TFER2@aol.com. Phone: 541-490-6528. Website: www.leg.state.or.us/ferrioli.
- **Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313.

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- **The White House**, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20500; Phone-comments: 202-456-1111; Switchboard: 202-456-1414.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Grant County "one great criminal rat trap"

To the Editor:

Malheur Occupier Scott Willingham recently pleaded guilty in federal court. He moved to Grant County after the occupation. Why choose Grant County since he told the FBI he planned to assassinate Harney County Commissioner Grasty (March 24, OregonLive)? Dan Perry spoke with Willingham before his arrest and said Willingham said he "talked to Sheriff Palmer the other day" (March 23, Blue Mountain Eagle). Did he move to Grant County because of a possible positive opinion of Palmer? If so, then the rest of America wants Grant County to re-elect Palmer so other domestic terrorists, aspiring assassins, convicted felons

illegally possessing firearms and thieves, who may have a positive opinion of Palmer, will have a reason to leave where they live and move to Grant County.

Consider Michael Emry, who moved from Idaho to Grant County, who built a bomb for someone, who built 66 illegal machine guns and who was arrested by the FBI for illegally possessing a .50 caliber machine gun, which he stole (May 5, OregonLive). Did Emry move to Grant County because of Palmer? He glowingly praised Palmer, and supporters drew a connection with Palmer, claiming the FBI arrested him when Palmer was out of town (May 6, OregonLive). If he moved to Grant County because of a possible positive opinion of Palmer, then the rest of America wants Grant County to re-elect Palmer so that other bomb makers, illegal ma-

chine gun makers, illegal possessors of .50 caliber machine guns and gun thieves, who may have a positive opinion of Palmer, will have a reason to leave where they live and move to Grant County.

The rest of America wants Grant County to become one great criminal rat trap, possibly luring thousands of dangerous criminals like Willingham and Emry. What's the bait possibly luring criminal rats to leave where they live and move to Grant County: those criminal rats possibly having a positive opinion of Sheriff Palmer. So, Grant County, do continue re-electing Palmer sheriff. The rest of America will thank you because their big criminal loss may become your big criminal gain.

Brian McDonough
Bennington, New Hampshire



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