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TITLE=AGRICULTURE REPORT - Genetic Engineering Crop Debate

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This is the VOA Special English AGRICULTURE REPORT.

New reports are adding to the debate about genetic engineering. The reports offer conflicting information about genetically-engineered crops.

Genetic engineering is the technology of changing the genes of living things. Genes are parts of cells that control growth and development. A changed gene directs a plant or other organism to do things it normally does not do.

Last month, the United Nations Development Program released its yearly Human Development Report. It supports the use of genetically-engineered crops in developing countries. It criticizes environmental groups that oppose the use of such products.

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr is the report's lead writer. She says many people have forgotten about the problem of world hunger. She adds that at least eight-hundred-million people still do not have enough to eat. She says genetic engineering can help to increase the amount of farmers produce quickly and effectively.

Critics of genetic engineering say the U-N report does not deal with the possible risks of genetic engineering. They say the technology represents a threat to human health and the environment.

Food First is a policy research group based in the United States. Food First agrees that genetically-engineered crops may be good in the future. Yet the group says it would support a ban on the use of these crops until tests show they are safe.

In the past, we reported on a product called StarLink corn. StarLink is the only genetically-engineered crop grown in the United States that is not approved for human use.

Three years ago, the Environmental Protection Agency approved StarLink corn as food for animals only. The E-P-A expressed concern that a protein in StarLink might cause allergic reactions in people.

A few weeks ago, a group of American scientists found no evidence that StarLink corn had made anyone sick. An independent laboratory confirmed the findings.

Yet, the E-P-A has just decided not to permit even small amounts of StarLink corn in

human food. The decision followed the release of a report by an agency advisory group. The advisors said there is not enough evidence to dismiss the possibility of allergic reactions. They said StarLink had not been proven safe for people.

This VOA Special English AGRICULTURE REPORT was written by George Grow.

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