

Q: A recent study from the Pew Research Center found that 88 percent of scientists believe in the safety of GMOs, yet only 37 percent of the public believes that. What is driving such a discrepancy?

A: There are a lot of cultural factors behind these kinds of moral panics. But the understanding on this issue is very shallow, which it is on almost any issue that is complicated, and this is a very complicated issue. This causes an emotional trigger. People have the intuition that it is something scary or unnatural and ultimately this has to be turned around.

Q: One of the things that comes across in anti-GMO rhetoric is that GMOs only contain Roundup-brand glyphosate. How do we move the focus away from that?

A: Part of the strategy is to come out with good, useful products and take the conversation in a different direction away from glyphosate and into developing countries with crops that have more obvious environmental and health benefits.

Q: In a recent *New York Times* story you spoke about the benefits of the GMO eggplant. Do you expect that there will eventually be greater acceptance of GMOs in foreign countries?

A: Every country is different. Hungary has written anti-GMO language into its constitution and France and Italy are not far off. These are countries where the GMO issue is seen as threatening their cultural identity. They believe in their food culture and own sense of authenticity. But the tide is turning in areas like sub-Saharan Africa, and the



Mark Lynas spoke to Simplot Treasure Valley Idaho employees in May about his changing views on GMOs. The Food Producers of Idaho also sponsored a public talk by Lynas at the Egyptian Theater in Boise.

need for GM technology as a part of more modern agriculture is increasingly accepted – this will do a lot to ensure food security.

Q: The *National Geographic* recently published an article that focused on the war on science and you've said that the scientific community is losing the battle. What is the science community doing wrong?

A: One of the reasons people buy conspiracies about GMOs is because the industry is felt to be non-transparent. People are conditioned to feel scared about something being imposed on their food supply without them knowing it.

Q: The anti-GMOs would likely say that the obvious solution for more transparency is to label GMOs. Is that the solution?

A: People don't even know what GMO stands for let alone what it means. Those behind labeling initiatives really are aiming to scare people away, but how do you address the public's right to know? You address it with transparency. As an industry, we should want people to preferentially seek out our products, so the idea that we would always want to hide the presence of every single modified or biotech trait forever is increasingly out of date. Let's figure out ways to be maximally transparent and use this as a positive opportunity to communicate why these traits are important and why they are in the foods to start with. We should say, 'this is our product, this is why we're proud of it, this is what the traits are and this is why we're doing it.' And then when people demand the right to know, we can say, 'it's already on the package.'

Q: As you've been talking about your change from an anti-GMO activist, you also continue to talk about climate change. Why is it important to continue linking the two?

A: The climate change issue is central to my own story. If it weren't for having spent years defending the science on climate change and talking about a scientific consensus, I wouldn't have changed my mind on GMOs. You can't just go through life exercising confirmation bias and only assimilating information that conforms to your preexisting beliefs. The thing about science is that your personal intuitions are often wrong. I make a real point of challenging audiences with the climate change issue. If you're going to ask science to prove that GMO crops are safe you should probably also accept that climate change is happening. Almost every farmer will tell you that the weather is changing. They've seen that within generations of their families and they know how to change practices and adapt to it.

Q: How can we personally change the debate on GMOs?

A: Everybody has to be an ambassador. All of the social science research on communications shows that people believe their friends and family more than they believe any other source whether it be celebrities or talking heads. I think everyone has an active responsibility to talk about the work they do and explain it to people. It's important to be involved in the broader sustainability conversation. Simplot has a broader role in the world and what Simplot is doing must help protect food security for decades to come.

To find out more about Mark Lynas, visit www.marklynas.org.