

NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

- Rob:** Hello I'm Rob. Welcome to 6 Minute English. With me today is Finn. Hello Finn.
- Finn:** Hello Rob.
- Rob:** Now Finn, I'd like to start by asking you a question. Would you eat a purple coloured tomato?
- Finn:** Purple? Well, that depends. Is it a naturally coloured tomato? Where does it come from? Is this an **artificial** tomato? Rob, tell me more.
- Rob:** Artificial – yes, you mean is it man-made and trying to copy something that is natural? Well, in a way – yes. Because scientists have developed a **genetically modified** purple tomato; they took red tomato plants and changed their genetic patterns so that they now produce new, purple tomatoes.
- Finn:** Yes, so this would be an example of GM – genetically modified – food. It's something we'll be discussing more soon and, of course, looking at some related vocabulary.
- Rob:** But here's another question for you Finn that hasn't been modified – or changed – in any way! GM food has been researched and experimented with for many years but do you know when the first genetically modified food was first sold commercially? Was it in:
- a) 1974
 - b) 1984
 - c) 1994
- Finn:** Well, we think of GM food as a recent thing so I'll say the opposite, a) 1974.
- Rob:** OK, we'll find out if you're right later on. Let's talk more now about genetically modified food – or GM food. It's called this because the food's **genes** have been changed. This means the way it grows is different from the way it grows when it isn't touched by humans.
- Finn:** Yes, so, growing GM food – or crops – is controversial. Some scientists think it's needed to meet the world's growing demand for food.
- Rob:** Yes, GM food can **resist** – or stop the effects of – some **pests** or bad weather. It can grow more quickly, meaning even more crops can be **cultivated** – or grown.

Finn: But opponents of GM food – people who argue against it – say we don't know enough about its effect on the environment.

Rob: And then there are the fears about who controls what's grown.

Finn: Yes, but despite this, GM food has become an important part of food production. Crops like sweetcorn, rape plants, wheat and tomatoes have all been genetically modified.

Rob: Yes, like the purple tomato, which was recently developed in the UK. It has a dark **pigment** – or colour – which gives it the same potential health benefits as blueberries.

Finn: Well, that sounds like a good thing. And not only that, it has an **antioxidant** – that's a substance that stops the decaying process – which tests show could help fight cancer.

Rob: One day we could see these purple tomatoes on pizzas or in our tomato ketchup. Let's hear from Professor Cathie Martin who is a plant biologist from The John Innes Centre who developed this tomato. What does she say is good about this new food?

Professor Cathie Martin, Plant Biologist, John Innes Centre:

With these purple tomatoes, you can get the same compounds that are present in blueberries and cranberries that give them their health benefits but you can apply them to foods that people actually eat in significant amounts and that are reasonably affordable.

Rob: So she says the good thing about this development is we can get health benefits from something we eat **significant** amounts of – so lots of – and they will be reasonably **affordable** – so it will be cheap.

Finn: Yes but there's still maybe a problem with the colour. We are affected by the colour of stuff we put in our mouths. I mean, who eats blue food?!

Rob: That's true. And also because the European Union has restrictions on growing GM food, this tomato has to be grown in Canada where rules are more supportive of GM foods.

Finn: OK. Well, Professor Nick Pidgeon, who is an Environmental Psychologist, says in the UK there is some **distrust** of GM food.

Rob: He says some people are concerned all this is messing with nature – it's not natural – and maybe we don't know what the long-term consequences are.

Finn: And a big concern is that large corporations will have control over the technology. And this could mean they control food prices too. You know Rob, I think this is a debate that will go on and on and on.

Rob: Indeed. But it's now time to reveal the answer to today's question. Earlier I asked you if you knew when the first genetically modified food was first sold commercially.

Finn: I said a) 1974.

Rob: Interesting. The answer is actually 1994. A company called *Calgene* sold a product that delayed the **ripening** of tomatoes.

Finn: OK, well, I guess that means the fruit could last longer and it would stop it going soft?

Rob: That was the idea. Now, before we go, Finn, could you remind us of some of the vocabulary that we've heard today?

Finn: Yes, I will.

artificial
genetically modified
genes
resist
pests
cultivated
pigment
antioxidant
significant
affordable
distrust
ripening

Rob: Well, that brings us to the end of today's 6 Minute English. We hope you've enjoyed today's programme. Please join us again soon.

Both: Bye.

Vocabulary and definitions

artificial	made by people, copying something made in nature
genetically modified	having its genetic structure changed for a particular purpose (sometime shortened to GM)
genes	parts of the DNA in a cell that control the physical development or characteristics of an individual plant or animal
resist	fight against
pests	insects or small animals that damage crops
cultivated	developed to be grown on farms
pigment	natural substance that gives colour
antioxidant	a natural chemical that slows down the decaying process
significant	important or noticeable
affordable	not expensive
distrust	not trusting or believing someone or something
ripening	becoming fully grown or ready for eating

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