



10-18-2010

## New Book From William Munro Looks at Genetically Modified Foods

Rachel Hatch  
*Illinois Wesleyan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hatch, Rachel, "New Book From William Munro Looks at Genetically Modified Foods" (2010). *News and Events*. 1564.

<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/1564>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

## New Book From William Munro Looks at Genetically Modified Foods

October 18, 2010

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – In the 1970s, scientists worked out how to move genes across species. The world buzzed with possibilities for recombinant DNA. This breakthrough led agricultural scientists to eventually develop genetically modified (GM) seeds in the 1990s, which was hailed as a potential step to ending hunger by creating plants that might withstand adverse weather. Soon after, however, widespread protests of “Frankenfoods” emerged, along with a highly political debate about genetically modified organisms (GMO) that continues today.

In his new book, *Fighting for the Future of Food: Activists versus Agribusiness in the Struggle over Biotechnology* (University Of Minnesota Press, 2010), Illinois Wesleyan Professor of Political Science William Munro has joined Rachel Schurman of the University of Minnesota to explore the debate over genetically modified seeds.

According to Munro, the main focus of the book is to “go beyond labels” of those involved in the debate. “These are two different adversaries from two different life worlds,” he said. “They did not and do not meet and speak to each other. I think the two sides would get better traction with one another if they understood each other, rather than label one another.”

The book does not take sides on the issue, but is a scholarly analysis that includes extensive interviews of those involved in the debate over GMs, including anti-GM activists, GM scientists and those incorporations working to advocate GMs. Munro and Schurman examined the debate as it evolved in Europe, then the United States, and finally how it is currently developing in Africa. “Our goal is for people to come to understand the issue and what is at stake for activists and proponents,” he said.

Although once hailed as the key to ending world hunger, GMs are now viewed more as part of a potential arsenal to battle hunger. In the book, Munro and Schurman suggest it was the efforts of the activists that changed the trajectory of the biotechnologies. “Through the debate, it is becoming understood that this is a political technology,” he said. “Some corporations made the mistake of trying to sell it as a silver bullet to end hunger, and it backfired. When activists challenged this idea, it helped define the use of GMs, allowing them to be incorporated into broader technologies to solve hunger.”

The debate over GM food still rages. Last month, the FDA was close to approving the sale of genetically modified salmon, which grow twice as quickly as salmon in the wild. One U.S. Senator dubbed the salmon “frankenfish,” and activists protested the race to get the fish to market. Yet Munro said speed is generally in the nature of producing GM foods. “The person who funds the research decides how to use it,” said Munro. “There is a built in aggression to market the products, so corporations can recoup research and development costs.” Munro sees the technology drifting away from privatization on some

levels. "Look at the Gates Foundation, which has made a commitment to deal with world hunger," he said. "They are very careful to say that GMs can be *part* of the solution."

No matter how the debate proceeds, Munro said GMOs are here to stay. He noted GM corn and soybeans appear in everything from high fructose corn syrup to soy milk. "There is no way to get it out of the food chain now." He hopes the book, which is part of the University of Minnesota's Social Movements, Protest, and Contention Series, will inspire people, especially students, to discuss GMOs. "This book is a way for people to talk about social movements, and give them the tools to talk about the issues," he said.

Munro, who has a doctorate in political science from Yale University, joined the Illinois Wesleyan faculty in 2000. He is the director of Illinois Wesleyan's International Studies Program, and the author of *The Moral Economy of the State: Conservation, Community Development, and State-Making in Zimbabwe*.

*Contact: Rachel Hatch, (309) 556-3960*