

NOTE FOR THE PRESS

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Note for the Press N°5
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WHO ANSWERS QUESTIONS ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

- What are the benefits and risks of genetically modified (GM) foods and crops for human health and the environment?
- Are GM foods safe?
- How do scientists determine if a new GM food is safe for human consumption? Does the method used differ from the safety assessment of traditional foods?
- In which countries are GM foods available on the market?
- How have public concerns about the safety of GM foods affected their marketing in the European Union?
- What future developments are expected in the field of genetically modified organisms?
- What is WHO doing in this area and why?

These are some of the questions the World Health Organization answers in a first-ever document published today entitled *20 Questions on Genetically Modified Foods*. *20 Questions* is available at: <http://www.who.int/fsf/GMfood/q&a.pdf>. Its intended audience is the public, governments, the media and public health specialists working in this area.

20 Questions comes at a time when some countries, out of concern for safety and trade of their foodstuffs, have refused to accept donations of GM food, and public debate still rages in many countries.

20 Questions points out that individual GM foods and their safety must be assessed on a case by case basis, making general statements on the safety of all GM foods impossible. GM foods on the international market have passed risk assessments and are not likely to present risks for human health. No effects on human health have been shown as a result of the consumption of such foods by the general population in the countries where they have been approved.

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However, WHO will take an active role regarding GM foods to ensure that public health can benefit as much as possible from the new technology and to make sure health will not be adversely affected by consumption of GM foods. It is imperative to guard against allergenicity of GM foods and transfer of antimicrobial resistance from food to humans, for instance. On the positive side, GM foods could help improve food security through better protection from pests and drought, produce vaccines and increase nutrient levels of foods.

Modern technologies must continue to be thoroughly evaluated, looking at both human and environmental effects together and not in isolation.

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All WHO Press Releases; Fact Sheets and Features as well as other WHO information on this subject can be obtained on Internet on the WHO home page: <http://www.who.int>