

This past month, in Mrs. Burd's World History I class, we have been learning and researching case studies about agriculture from all over the world! We studied the Incan terrace farmers, the Maasai beekeepers, the Mongolian herders, as well as the GMO (genetically modified organism) farmers in Bangladesh, who immediately intrigued me, because of my interest in sustainable farming.

Bangladesh is known for its fertile soil due to its location by the Ganges River. Because of this, 40% of its population are farmers, and 70% of Bangladesh's land is used to grow crops such as rice, mango, jackfruit, bamboo, and eggplant. However, due to the country's ever-expanding population, the demand for food is causing farmers to explore the potential of farming with genetically modified organisms, also known as GMOs. GMOs work by altering the genetic material of an organism, in a way that does not occur naturally in the world. On one hand, agriculture can become more sustainable, overall plant yield can be increased, and certain genetic modifications allow some crops to be resistant to pests. On the other hand, farmers speculate that GMOs are harmful for humans and the environment, as well as the usage of them will allow larger agricultural companies to dictate small farmers.

Because of the controversy surrounding this issue, I was curious to see what some of our knowledgeable community members had to say about it. I talked to Dr. Farley-Barnes and Mr. Wisdo, both of which are chemistry teachers, as well as one student, to get a sense of their overall thoughts, as well as a bit of scientific information. Dr. Farley-Barnes immediately said, "I think that GMO farming has a lot of potential benefits, and a lot of potential downsides," which seemed to be a common consensus among all three individuals. The student I interviewed added, "If GMOs are implemented properly with controlled safety measures, and without diminishing the variety of crops, it could potentially be beneficial." However, Mr. Wisdo said something that made me realize the bigger picture of this situation. He said, "We have been sort of eating GMOs for a long time - think about corn breeding." His nuanced perspective made me think about how we are all surrounded by GMOs all the time. When farmers selectively breed their crops, they are intentionally picking out the preferred traits of certain foods, which is essentially what genetically modifying crops accomplishes.



On the bottom, right-hand side of this baby butterhead lettuce label, you can see a small label with a butterfly on it, and the words "Non GMO Project Verified." This is the official label for all non GMO certified products.

Through my conversations with these three community members, my personal point of view of GMO farming has been expanded, and I am really appreciative that I have access to so many intelligent community members here at school. I love that we get the opportunity to explore the different lifestyle practices of people from all around the world, and am eager to continue learning about other global issues that impact all of us!