

A Quick Run-down on GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms)

History

GMOs are created in the laboratory when scientists isolate genes that are responsible for certain traits in one plant and insert the gene into another plant, or add genes from non-plant organisms to a plant.

Types

One of the most common non-plant organisms that is inserted into plants is the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*, or B.t. B.t. creates crystals that are toxic to insect larvae.

Function

Corn crops that have been modified by adding B.t. form pesticide within the plant to fight off pests such as the European corn borer.

Effects

Other GMOs work to improve drought tolerance, disease resistance, cold tolerance, increased nutrition, and even to grow vaccines inside vegetables.

Potential

The use of GMOs in food is very controversial, but many researchers believe that it is necessary to improve crops genetically in order to feed a growing world population. For example, improving the nutritional value of a crop like rice could help fight malnutrition in Third World countries.

