

[Reviving GM foods](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Monday 7 July 2008



[A nice piece](#) [3] detailing the new GM foods which are being developed. The first generation of such crops concentrated either on increasing yields or on decreasing inputs, thus raising the profit margins of farmers and thus the quantities grown. All good news of course but not enough to sway the near hysterical opposition to the technology.

The new generation of such foods depends rather more on increasing the nutritional quality of the crop, rather than volume or the reduction of input costs. For example:

Cassava has been packed with new genes that help the plant accumulate extra iron and zinc from the soil, and synthesise vitamins E and A.

Cassava is the basic crop for hundreds of millions ([some 800 million](#) [4]) around the world and its nutritional failings are responsible for the damaging of many lives through under- and mal-nutrition. The addition of those nutrients will help to reduce such problems: that vitamin A will for example stop many cases of blindness.

Sadly, there are those who would oppose even this:

Claire Hope Cummings, a former lawyer with the US Department of Agriculture and author of *Uncertain Peril: Genetic Engineering and the Future of Seeds*, published in March, said: "People do not need miracle crops offering enhanced nutrients. What they need is a good varied diet. Who wants to eat a giant bowl of cassava or golden rice each day? These ideas are just a new way of marketing GM."

It's true that most people do not wish to eat a giant bowl of cassava or rice each day and yes, that they would prefer a varied diet. But that isn't something that's on offer just yet: we need to remind ourselves that life currently offers all too many people all too short a list of options, none of said options being all that enviable and some just plain awful. Like, perhaps, eating a giant bowl of cassava or rice each day or eating nothing each day and thus dying.

The GM cassava, like the golden rice which is also vitamin A enhanced, will allow hundreds of millions to continue living and reduce their risk of going blind while doing so ([250,000](#) [5] children currently blind as a result of vitamin A deficiency and a further hundred million at risk).

I realise that Ms. Cummings (and no doubt others) will disagree with me here but I take that to be 100,250,000 damn good reasons why we should get on with marketing GM.

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