Foods With a Difference

by Shelley Francis

Sugar-free beets that still taste sweet, tastier tomatoes, and brighter-colored fruits and vegetables that stay ripe longer are all foods that are being grown now. How can they carry **traits**, such as being tastier, brighter, and riper? They are genetically engineered.

Genetic engineering is like making a change in a recipe. For example, when you make brownies, you mix together all of the usual **ingredients**. If you add an

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extra ingredient, like salt, the brownies will taste differently.

Genes are ingredients in the recipe for life. They carry the traits of living things. Your genes dictate what color hair and eyes you'll have, how tall you'll be, as well as many other traits. Genes carry traits for plants, too. By adding genes to a plant, you can sometimes create new traits. For example, adding a certain gene to a potato plant can make the potato plant **distasteful** to bugs. This makes some farmers happy because they don't have to use chemicals to keep bugs away from their plants.

It sounds great, but some people are **opposed** to the idea of food that is genetically engineered. Ronnie Cummins, from the Campaign for Food Safety, is against it. He says that one of the major **concerns** is allergies. Supermarkets don't always label foods that are genetically engineered. A consumer could unknowingly buy food that has an added gene from another food that he or she is allergic to. It could be dangerous.

Gary Burton from Monsanto, a seed company that engineers food, disagrees. He says his company tests for allergies. Burton believes that genetic engineering is a valuable tool for making better food. The technology can help farmers use less insecticide and grow healthier crops. Burton thinks there are many advantages.

Ben Cummins says that we just don't know what will happen in the future if we keep adding genes to foods. We could mistakenly create a monster.

People have different opinions about genetic engineering. One side supports it and thinks it will only help us. The other side is opposed to playing with nature and fears unknown danger. Which side do you think is right?

Think About It

How do you feel about food that is genetically engineered? Do you think the possibilities are exciting or scary?