

Lancaster Farming

OPINION

What We Know

We are often mesmerized by the amount of poll-taking over the issue of the safety of ag biotechnology.

These polls tend to gauge the overall confidence the American public may have — or not — to applying science to everyday living.

We received a release over the PRNewswire recently about another such poll, released earlier this month by the Pew Initiative on Food and Biotechnology. Zogby International conducted the poll.

Overall, respondents nationwide were more likely to say that the risks of biotechnology outweighed the benefits (40 percent to 33 percent), according to the release, while 19 percent thought the benefits and risks were about the same, and nine percent were unsure.

Generally, consumers seem unaware about risks and benefits of genetic engineering as a whole. Ten percent believe they have heard nothing about benefits of the technology.

Yet they believed in the potential of the technology to clean up toxic soils (74 percent), reduce soil erosion (73 percent), reduce fertilizer runoff into streams and lakes (72 percent), reduce the amount of water used to grow crops (68 percent), and others.

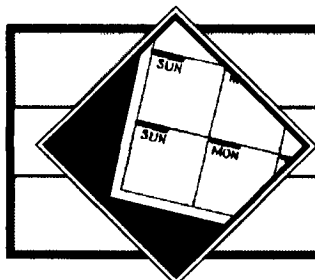
The poll included 1,214 adults nationwide with an additional 407 adults in California, conducted from Jan. 14-18 this year. Copies of the poll, according to the release, are available at <http://www.pewagbiotech.org/research/survey1-02.pdf>.

A modern American writer once wrote how bemused he was by the fact that, with so many libraries and bookstores, and with reams of information within easy reach, even via Internet for the remotest places on earth, that the public would still remain largely ignorant about so many topics. And some of them who are distrustful (and we know some) simply believe that, until we understand the exact nature of atoms, the behavior of atoms in forming genes, and ways to direct those genes, we cannot understand how truly "safe" biotechnology can be.

But yet we recognize those immediate benefits. And why wait until we understand all — who knows how long that may be? — when the direct benefits would certainly outweigh any risks for a large portion of the public right now.

Like any tool, biotechnology goes with the caveat, buyer beware, and of course, use wisely, even with a little bit of healthy skepticism.

By the way — did you know: agriculture is the nation's largest employer, with more than 21 million people working in some phase of the industry, from growing food and fiber to selling it in supermarkets? The industry generates 20 percent of the nation's gross national product (this last tidbit supplied by Colorado State University News).



❖ FARM CALENDAR ❖

Saturday, February 23
 American Agricultural Plastics Conference, Mission Valley, San Diego, Calif., (717) 238-9762.
 Annual Finger Lakes Grape Growers Convention, Waterloo, N.Y., (315) 536-5134.
 Beekeepers Spring Management Seminar, Montgomery

County 4-H Center, Creamery, 1 p.m.
 Western Pa. Gardening and Landscaping Symposium, Chatham College, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., (412) 473-2540.
 Warm Season Grasses Meeting, Columbia County Ag Center Extension, (717) 748-4722, ext. 126. Also Feb. 28.

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❖ FARM FORUM ❖

Editor:

It seems a little ironic that February is Dental Health Month, and last week I had my first appointment with a new dentist. I will have to admit that I was not really excited about going to the dentist, and I wondered what this new dentist would be like. I also had a lot of questions for him about my teeth and their care.

This initial appointment began with a question and answer session. He asked me many questions about my health in general. He feels that dental health relates to all other areas of your health. Not only did he

question my brushing and flossing habits, how I feel and what I eat were also an important part of this interview.

Then we began with the examination. He had a tiny camera that he used to look over my teeth and I could watch everything he did on a television hanging from the ceiling. As we looked at each tooth, he described what he saw and noted any problems that may exist. As this was happening, one of the hygienists was recording his findings on a dental chart. What an interesting way to view the inside of one's mouth. This was

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Now Is The Time
 By Leon Ressler
 Lancaster County Extension Director

To Purchase Crop Insurance For Drought Risk Management

The ongoing drought in Pennsylvania reminds us of the risks faced every year when crops are planted. Pennsylvania farmers are reminded that the final date to apply for crop insurance on most spring-planted crops for the 2002 crop year is March 15, 2002. Current policyholders likewise have until March 15 to make any changes to their existing contracts.

As a result of significant premium subsidy increases in 2000, crop insurance is now more cost effective than ever before, especially at the higher levels of coverage. For Pennsylvania growers the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture will pay 100 percent of the premium for catastrophic coverage (greater than 50 percent crop loss) and part of the premium for additional coverage for lower levels of crop loss. Crop insurance provides protection against losses in crop production because of natural perils such as drought, hail, or excessive moisture.

In addition, new revenue products such as crop revenue coverage and indexed income protection are also available, providing additional protection against declining grain prices at harvest. Producers are strongly urged to contact a local crop insurance agent as soon as possible for a premium quote and additional details. Don't put it off! For a list of crop insurance agents in your area, contact your local USDA Farm Service Agency office or log on to the following Risk Management Agency Website: <http://www3.rma.usda.gov/tools/agents/>.

To Prevent Creosote Buildup

Dr. Robert Thee, housing and family resource management agent in Lancaster County, offers this advice on managing your woodstove and preventing creosote buildup. Creosote is a by-product of wood burning which is formed from unburned gases that condense onto the surfaces of the wood burning system, especially the flue.

Although you cannot eliminate creosote, by purchasing the right size woodstove and operating it properly on a daily basis, you can minimize its formation and at the same time get more heat output from your wood.

There are three guidelines to follow for reducing creosote buildup. The first is to burn dry wood. Dry firewood is wood that has been cut, split, and stored under cover for nine months to a year before being burned. By this time, the moisture content in the wood is 20 to 25 percent.

The second guideline involves burning the wood as completely as possible. This means always allowing enough air in the stove to maintain hot flames which will increase the combustion of the wood. A hotter fire and more complete burning result in less creosote.

The third guideline involves warming the flue as quickly as possible. Keep the stove drafts wide open when the fire is first lit and keep them wide open for at least 30 minutes or more so the heat from the fire warms the chimney flue. This will cause a strong upward draft in the chimney. The draft will exit the

smoke faster from the chimney and will result in less creosote buildup.

Never close the drafts completely. This shuts off air supply to the fire and prevents wood from completely burning. If you still have an excessive amount of creosote accumulation after following these steps, you should check for an incorrect chimney height or size and lack of incoming air to the fire.

According to Dr. Larry Jahn, wood products specialist, North Carolina State University, there are products designed to reduce creosote buildup. Research, however, indicates these cleaners have no significant effect on the reduction of creosote. Even granting that chemical cleaners may sometimes work, it is clear they do not always work. Therefore, it is dangerous for those who use chemical cleaners to presume they are working, for if they are not, complacency may result in less frequent inspection and cleaning, and that could lead to a chimney fire. Frequent chimney inspection and cleaning when necessary are essential to heating with wood safely.

To Visit Penn State's Weed Management Website

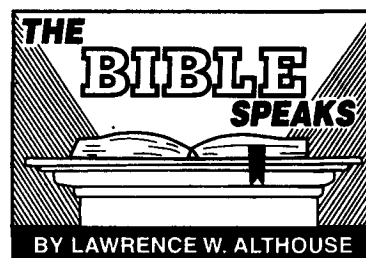
The weed management Website produced by the Penn State Crop and Soil Science department has a wealth of information related to weed science. You can visit the URL at <http://weeds.cas.psu.edu/>.

At this Website you will find information on weed identification, herbicides, pesticide labels, weed management publications, invasive plant information, as well as abstracts on weed research projects. There is a section on weed related job openings. At this site you can also learn about graduate study opportunities in weed science. Become familiar with this site before the spring workload picks up. Then when weed questions arise during the growing season, you will know where to go for the answers.

Quote Of The Week:

"An optimist sees an opportunity in every calamity; a pessimist sees a calamity in every opportunity."

— Winston Churchill



THE BIBLE SPEAKS
 BY LAWRENCE W. ALTHOUSE

MISPLACED PITY

Background Scripture:
 Jonah 3 through 4.
Devotional Reading:
 Psalms 113.

If you read the story of Jonah and don't laugh a little along the way, you're missing the point. Jonah is laughable, because we can see ourselves in him: petulant, sulking, and ready to pick up his marbles and go home. In him we can laugh at ourselves and that can be healing if it helps us to see how childish adults can act in God's sight.

Finally, Jonah surrenders and agrees to carry out God's plan. Let's at least give Jonah credit for recognizing the inevitable — some of us can't even do that. Going a day's journey into this vast city, he cried: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4). This part Jonah relished. He liked pronouncing doom and gloom. Some are never happier than when prophesying God's judgment — on others!

We also need to give some credit to the king of Nineveh. We know very little about him, but we are told that he was fast to catch on. "Nineveh shall be overthrown"? Well then,

"... let them cry mightily to God; yea, let everyone turn from his evil way..." (3:7,8). The king is a pragmatist: "Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we perish not?" (3:9). Oh well, it's worth a try!

Pragmatism

Now, you may call him an opportunist, turning over a new leaf only to avoid destruction. But at least it is better than one who responds to dire warnings with indifference or hostility.

Some refuse to change even when common sense says that nothing else will save them. Changing your ways just to escape destruction may not be the purest of spiritual motives, but it is better than no change at all. Whether the king was sincere or not, "When God saw... how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil... and he did not do it" (3:9).

So God is pleased with this change and the people are ecstatic. There is only one unhappy soul: Jonah: "... it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, '... is this not what I said when I was yet in my country? ... for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful...' (4:2). Jonah was furious because God acted like God.

But, before we chuckle at Jonah's childishness, should we not ask whether we, too, do not become unhappy because God acts like God, forgiving whom we condemn?

More Childish Than Ever

Then Jonah becomes even more childish: "Therefore now, O Lord, take my life from me... for it is better for me to die than to live" (4:3). If

God won't do it Jonah's way, he'd rather die. That will show God!

"Do you do well to be angry?" God asks, but there is no response from Jonah, who goes to the east of the city where he may wait to see what will happen to it. Jonah still hoped for the worst!

If I had been God, I would have lowered the boom on Jonah. But God, not being me, deals somewhat tenderly and playfully with him. First, he causes a plant to shade Jonah. The next day, however, he sends a worm to attack the plant and it withers, plus a hot sun and sultry east wind that beats upon Jonah, whose only response is petulance: "It is better for me to die than to live" (4:9). Jonah can pout with the best of them!

God is certainly patient with this guy (as I hope he is patient with the one who writes these words). "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" You bet! says Jonah. Way beyond the point where I would have exploded, God says: "You pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow... And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left...?" (4:11)

The problem is not that Jonah pitied the plant, but that he did not pity the people of Nineveh, who were like cattle, without understanding. But then there was Jonah, who understood the mercy of God, but couldn't bring himself to share it with others.

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