

The DiGEST Issue 1

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GES Center Newsletter

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the diGEST

A monthly newsletter from NC State's Genetic Engineering and Society Center, detailing and highlighting the most recent center news, activity, and scholarship.

In this issue:



Publications

Check out the journal articles and radio broadcasts our esteemed faculty have been featured, quoted, and published in.

News and Events

Learn what's been happening and what's coming up for the Center in the near future.



Message from Director

Jennifer Kuzma introduces the first edition of the GES newsletter.



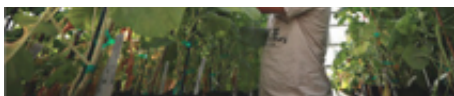
Recent Publications



By 'Editing' Plant Genes, Companies Avoid Regulation

Excerpt from the *New York Times* article:

"Jennifer Kuzma, co-director of the Genetic Engineering and Society Center at North Carolina



Engineering and Society Center at North Carolina State University, said that there would soon be a flood of crops seeking regulatory exemptions and that there needed to be a public discourse about what should be regulated, in part to allay possible consumer anxiety.

‘It’s not that I think these are risky,’ she said of the crops escaping regulation. ‘But the very fact that this is the route we are taking without any discussion is troubling.’”

Read the full [article](#).

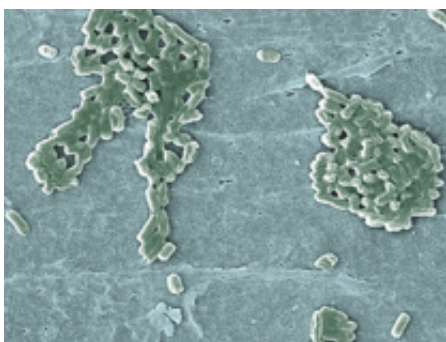
Nutrition and Safety Key to Consumer Acceptance of GM Foods

NC State’s GES Center recently collaborated with the University of Minnesota (UM) on research on consumer acceptance of genetic modification and nanotechnology in food.

The study found that a majority of consumers would be willing to purchase GM or nanotech foods if the technology was proven to enhance nutrition or improve safety.



The paper, “[Heterogeneous Consumer Preferences for Nanotechnology and Genetic modification Technology in Food Products](#),” was published online in the *Journal of Agricultural Economics*.



Scientists give Genetically Modified Organisms a Safety Switch

The Center’s co-director Jennifer Kuzma was recently featured on the National Public Radio program [All Things Considered](#) discussing gene-manipulation tools that researchers at Harvard and Yale are using to engineer safety features into designer organisms.

She says, "I think it's commendable they're starting to design safety into genetically modified organisms. However, I don't really think it's going to affect the public perception that much or the way we have to deal with the uncertainty anyway. You may reduce the chance of spread, but you cannot eliminate it completely.”

Recent & Upcoming Events



The Center was pleased to host the U.S. Department of Agriculture on Thursday, March 12th and Friday, March 13th for a Stakeholder's Workshop on Coexistence. Videos of all the speakers from the event, including Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, can be found on our website.



Graduate Participation in USDA Workshop

The USDA specifically supports the diversity of agricultural forms as vital to the nation's food security and energy needs as well as its economic and environmental health; this workshop is one component of their broader efforts to gather information and raise awareness about practices that support the coexistence of organic, biotech, and conventional farms. Graduate students affiliated with the Center attended this invitation-only meeting as volunteers, assisting with tasks as various as escorting dignitaries and moderating breakout sessions. Each student was asked to reflect on their observations and impressions of the meeting as students and researchers interested in the discourse, development, and governance of agricultural biotechnology. Their reflections can be found [here](#).

When Science and Citizens Connect: Public Engagement on Genetically Modified Organisms

Workshop attended by Fred Gould, Jason Delborne, Jen Baltzegar, and Sophia Webster who each made presentations at various sessions during the workshop.

January 15-16, 2015
National Academy of Sciences
Washington, DC

This 2-day workshop explored what is known about successful models in scientific engagement with the public. We used the topic of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) as an example to focus the discussion. Geared for life science researchers and also the broader life science community, the workshop featured many speakers at the forefront of the science of science communication.

Speakers provided perspectives on scientific engagement in a world where science is interpreted through a variety of lenses, including values and predisposition, and present ways that scientists can improve engagement by using the findings of social scientists. The workshop included breakout sessions in which participants examine recent examples of interfaces involving GMOs. You can visit the [website](#) for more information or to watch presentations from the workshop.

The Science of Science Communication

What roles do scientists and/or policymakers play in the regulation and dissemination of knowledge concerning GMO's?

Written by NCSU graduate students Jen Baltzegar and Sophia Webster, this story details the events of the National Academy of Sciences workshop on GMOs. Day one of the workshop was divided into a session on “The Sciences of Engagement, Decisions, and Politics,” and a second session about “Science and Perceptions: Knowns, Unknowns, and Challenges.” Four speakers at each session presented their views on how the public interacts with scientists when it comes to genetically modified organisms. The GES Center’s Jason Delborne gave the final talk of the day, “Engaging Publics in Science and Technology.” The panel discussion in the afternoon focused on whether or not scientists have a role in the decision to label or not to label genetically modified foods.

The second day of the workshop allowed grad students Baltzegar and Webster, along with Rebecca Harrison, a grad student from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, to present breakout case study sessions designed to apply knowledge about GMOs and regulation to real world scenarios. The case studies were: Transgenic Corn and the Monarch Butterfly (Baltzegar), Transgenic American Chestnut (Webster), and GM Mosquitoes (Harrison). The workshop concluded with take home messages from some of the experts in the room that encouraged attendees to foster a more positive communication environment between scientists, policymakers, and society. You can access the entire story written by Jen Baltzegar and Sophia Webster on the GES Center website.

Director's Corner

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Genetic Engineering and Society (GES) center!

Our center has been in existence for almost a year, and it has been a busy one. Among many other programs and activities, we've hosted key national events, started a Resident and Visiting Fellows Program, and initiated the GES History Series. In this inaugural diGEST newsletter, we anticipate that you will get a sense of the variety and importance of our work. We are very proud of our accomplishments, however, more important than what we've done is who we are. Who we are is the foundation of our success, and we'd like to take this opportunity to share our thoughts about the uniqueness of GES.

First, GES is made up of diverse people coming from different biases, disciplines, and perspectives. Our center has over 25 faculty engaged—some who work on technology development and strongly believe in the promise of GEOs and others that are more critical of the speed at which GEOs are being deployed and the current system of oversight/governance.

We do not force consensus here at GES, but work to respect and learn from a range of voices in the debates surrounding GEOs as well as different approaches to carefully considering their societal implications. We strive to understand multiple evidence- and value-based perspectives, acknowledge them, and move the discussion forward with multi-directional learning and understanding. We are all members of the public as well as experts and stakeholders in our fields.

Second, we commit to the idea of engaged scholarship. We are busy--out in communities presenting and listening, working with partners on programs, and developing scholarship that not only contributes to theory, but also practice. We appreciate working with stakeholders outside of the university and have close partnerships with external groups. We believe that we have as much to learn from them as they can from those of us in academe.

Third, we engage students and postdocs. Students take leadership roles in several of our activities—moderating at national conferences, developing decision and analytical tools, researching social and natural science problems, and engaging in

many new tools, addressing social and natural science problems, and engaging in our events. We are training the next generation of scholars and practitioners to cross boundaries and be entrepreneurs at the nexus of science, technology, and society.

And finally, we look towards the future. Although many faculty projects investigate the first generation of GE crops and food, and we consider that work very important, our core center efforts have focused on analyzing and preparing for emergent biotechnologies, like gene editing, gene drives, GE animals (including genetic pest management), and synthetic biology. We are developing and testing methods for studying the future. To our knowledge, we are the only academic center dedicated to emerging applications of biotechnology deployed in agriculture, the environment, and industry, and the only one with a commitment to inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary work at the nexus of natural science, social science, and humanities.

In a world increasingly polarized and divisive, we celebrate and learn from the diversity of opinions and approaches to developing and evaluating GEOs. We also welcome your interest and participation in our efforts.

- Jennifer Kuzma



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