



Biotechnology Literacy Project, Risk and the Future of Food:

How Can Scientists Best Engage the GMO Debate with a Skeptical Public?

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When it comes to views on food and agricultural biotechnology, the public is divided. The web and media are awash with misinformation. Fears that our 'natural' food supply is at risk and public health hangs in the balance proliferate. Anti-technology skeptics and dedicated opponents of crop and animal biotechnology abound. What can be done to raise the quality of public discourse?

Independent scientists, who the public holds in great esteem, can play a unique role in framing the food safety and GMO debate grounded in science and targeted on the costs and benefits of these breakthrough technologies. Credible, independent and effective voices active in the mainstream and social media are a prerequisite for successful public engagement. Many researchers are passionate and willing to engage. However, credible influencers typically lack resources, support, networking and the necessary training necessary. Those who do often do not have the time or the benefit of a support network.

The **Biotechnology Literacy Project (BLP)** is designed to address this public education and outreach gap. We will bring together journalists, social media professionals and policy management experts with a background in food and technology as it relates to GMOs to help respected academics and select graduate students learn and polish communication skills. The goal is to provide foundational training and establish a support network to sustain, extend and grow independent voices.

Participants will be drawn from various disciplines including plant and animal genetics, entomology, plant pathology, food science nutrition, organic farming and intersecting disciplines. The BLP faculty will include internationally known scientists such as Kevin Folta, Val Giddings, Bruce Chassy and Karl Haro von Mogel; social media expert Jay Byrne; and prominent journalists including the Genetic Literacy Project's Jon Entine, Discover's Keith Kloor, David Ropeik, formerly of the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis and Washington Post food writer Tamar Haspel (journalists tentatively confirmed).

The BLP faculty will help candidates better manage science communications online, support engagement at their respective universities and develop skills for the regional and national media outreach. They will receive training to appear as experts in legislative and local

government hearings, and other policy making and related outreach opportunities. After the training, 'graduates' will become part of a developing network of academics and other experts

BLP Curricula (in development)

- Overview of key issues in GMO debate: controversies around food production and safety, risk communications, science communication, labeling, patents and legislation, organics v conventional agriculture, NGO tactics
- Media training: writing effective articles and blogs, navigating the interview process, debates
- Social media: Twitter, Facebook, Google+ platforms; creating blogs and websites
- Accessing and leveraging biotech resources

The goal of the BLP is to grow a cadre of independent experts prepared to respond to media crises and engage the public in constructive discussion on agricultural biotechnology and the future of food. Candidates will be provided with training and 'take-home' packages: tools and resources, including issue briefs, resource and research summaries, guideline documents and other supporting material. Post conference, the participants will join our growing outreach network and will remain connected through our BLP support operation, which will include webinars and future private and public events.

Interested candidates should contact:

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