
Listen to two students talking about genetically modified food. Frank is for GM food but his friend Ann is against it.

Optional exercise Listen to the conversation and decide whether these statements are True or False.
(Answers below)

- 1 Frank thinks Ann has been influenced by the newspapers.
 - 2 Frank thinks non-GM foods are safer than GM foods.
 - 3 Scientists have worked out a way of introducing a vaccine into bananas.
 - 4 Ann thinks food companies will make money out of feeding poor countries.
 - 5 Frank thinks Ann is being negative.
 - 6 Ann is worried about guinea pigs becoming extinct.
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Frank: So why are you so against genetically modified food then? I think you've been taken in by all the bad press.

Ann: No, that's not true. I've read up on the subject and I think there are just too many risks.

Frank: The GM foods that you get are probably safer than non GM foods.

Ann. Don't be daft. Where've you got that from?

Frank: Well, there are tighter controls for GM food. There are controls in each country and then at a European level as well. If they pass through all of those controls before they reach the shops they must be ok.

Ann: I just don't like the idea of having my food altered. What's wrong with the food we've always had?

Frank: We have to move with the times. The possibilities for GM food are endless.

Ann: What redder tomatoes or bigger strawberries?

Frank: Yes, for one thing – but what about vegetables with a higher vitamin content or bananas with vaccines built into them.

Ann: What? (laughing)

Frank: It's true. They've developed a way to produce bananas with the Hepatitis B vaccine.

Ann: Mm, not sure what I think of that. We haven't done enough research and playing around with crops is playing havoc with the wildlife. There are whole species of birds that are in danger of becoming extinct. Larks for example, they are rapidly decreasing in numbers and it's because of the chemicals they are using on GM foods.

Frank: They haven't proved that.

Ann: Not yet, no. But it's only a matter of time.

Frank: Mm.

Ann: And another think that worries me is the power that a few food companies will have if we start to rely on GM food. They'll dominate the poor countries even more than they do today.

Frank: They'll feed them.

Ann: At a price, yes. Maybe. I'm worried about the food chain too.

Frank: What do you mean?

Ann: Well, playing around with nature causes no end of damage to some plants and animals. When a species dies out or mutates, it has a knock-on effect on the whole ecosystem.

Frank: I think you're being cynical. You're not giving GM food a chance.

Ann: Not cynical, just cautious.

Frank: Ok, consider this. Global warming is threatening to destroy the habitat of polar bears.

Ann: What's this got to do with genetically modified food?

Frank: Everything. We could use GM food to change the polar bears' habitat now. That way we can prevent them from becoming extinct.

Ann: Ok, I quite like that idea.

Frank: Good. You're starting to come round to my way of thinking.

Ann: No. I'm just trying to understand. I don't like being a guinea pig and we are all being guinea pigs for the experiments they're doing on GM foods. I guess I don't like the way things seem to just be happening without much of a debate.

Frank: What do you mean? We're talking about it all the time.

Ann: Talking maybe, but nobody's listening.

Answers: 1 True, 2 False, 3 True, 4 True, 5 True, 6 False