

Biotechnology¹

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



Before you listen

Prediction activity

Which five words do you expect to hear in Frank and Ann's conversation about GM food?

Kitchen	transport	controls	flowers	crops
Experiments	history	chemicals	risks	husband

Vocabulary

Match the words and phrases in the table to their definitions.

1. genetically modified	2. vaccine	3. ecosystem	4. global warming
5. habitat	6. extinct	7. a guinea pig	8. climate change
9. daft	10. altered	11. havoc	12. cynical
13 cautious	14. dominate	15. a knock on effect	16. debate

Definitions

- | Definitions | Word |
|--|-------|
| A. Confusion and disorder. | _____ |
| B. An increase in the world temperature caused by gases like CO ₂ . | _____ |
| C. To control someone totally. | _____ |
| D. It describes a person who thinks people are selfish
– someone who doesn't trust anyone | _____ |
| E. A type of medicine that prevents people from getting a disease. | _____ |
| F. A formal discussion. | _____ |
| G. Something that happens because of the event that happened before. | _____ |
| H. It describes a plant or animal that has been changed by scientists. | _____ |
| I. All the animals and plants living in an area. | _____ |
| J. Changed, genetically improved. | _____ |
| K. When all the individuals of a species have died (like dinosaurs). | _____ |
| L. Someone who is used in a test for something such as new medicine or product. | _____ |
| M. It describes a silly or stupid person. | _____ |
| N. The natural home of an animal or plant. | _____ |
| O. The way the world's weather is changing. | _____ |
| P. It describes someone who is very careful. | _____ |

¹ Source: <http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/professionals-podcasts/biotechnology>

After you listen

Comprehension task

True or false

Listen to the conversation decide whether these statements are true or false.

1. Franks 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 new 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.

Language task

Choose the correct word.

Before you listen again, read this summary of the conversation between Frank and Ann and choose the correct word.

Frank is in favour of genetically modified food because he believes it can help to (1) _____ food for poor countries. He also thinks it should be used to make more vitamin-enhanced (2) _____ and to change the habitats of species that are in danger of losing their habitats and becoming (3) _____. Ann disagrees. She thinks GM foods are (4) _____ and potentially (5) _____. She is worried about rich countries dominating poor countries when they control the food supplies. She doesn't like the fact that companies are using her for their GM (6) _____. Ann thinks that GM food is responsible for the (7) _____ in the numbers of some birds. Frank says there is (8) _____ evidence to prove this.

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. provide/save 2. vegetables/meat 3. extinct/ill 4. tasteless/unnatural 5. expensive/dangerous 6. advertising/experiments 7. rise/fall 8. no/some |
|---|

Answer key

Prediction activity:

Chemicals controls crops experiments risks

Vocabulary:

- 1 H
- 2 E
- 3 I
- 4 B
- 5 N
- 6 K
- 7 L
- 8 O
- 9 M
- 10 J
- 11 A
- 12 D
- 13 P
- 14 C
- 15 G
- 16 F.

Comprehension task:

1. True.
2. False. He thinks that GM foods are probable safer than non-GM foods.
3. True
4. True
5. True
6. False. She is worried about the idea of being a guinea pig.

Language task

1. Provide
2. Vegetables
3. Extinct
4. Unnatural
5. Dangerous
6. Experiments
7. Fall
8. No

Transcript

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 thing 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.