



GM crops: the ethics debate

The dairy farmer

Adam Duguid, Farmer:

My family's been involved in farming in Lincolnshire for sort of three generations now so I suppose it was always natural that I would get involved one day.

Narrator:

Adam will take over running the farm from his father Ron. Ron in turn took over from his own father, Adam's namesake. But future generations may have to think twice about continuing the family tradition.

Adam Duguid:

In my grandfather's time, there was huge pressure on farmers to increase production. I think farmers actually did that very successfully. They were asked to increase production. They did increase production. And we did become self sufficient in food by the 1970's. However, I think the debate has moved on since then.

Narrator:

Adam is now working in a global market. He's competing with producers in countries like the US and China. They already have greater economies of scale. Now many such countries are introducing GM technology.

Adam Duguid:

If we're competing with say North American producers, where GM technology is already widely used, if they're able to produce food using GM technology, and not to use as much herbicide or whatever, therefore to reduce their costs, obviously if we're not using GM technology, we will only be able to produce food at a higher cost.

Narrator:

What Adam takes from his dairy herd, is consumed all over Britain in towns and cities. Unlike some of his customers, Adam's job involves working directly with nature. Perhaps this influences his ethical worldview. His is the anthropocentric view.

Adam Duguid:

I think that man has a right to exploit nature in order to live. We clearly have done and we clearly have to do so, in order to continue our existence on this planet. So the question is really to what extent. I think in an ideal world, we can exploit it to the extent that it is sustainable, that we can continue to exploit it in the future. I don't think that animals have rights in the commonly accepted usage of the term 'rights'. I think that we have responsibilities towards them to treat them humanely and to keep them in decent conditions. Do I fundamentally think that the lives of humans are more important than the lives of animals? Yes. Very simply. Yes.

Ruth Chadwick, Bioethicist:

This is quite a common sort of view in anthropocentrism, that animals don't have the same sort of moral status that humans have so they don't have rights, but we are moral beings and that makes us have to think about what responsibilities we have to other life forms.