

# ecoIslam

"...Uphold justice  
...even against your-  
selves or your parents  
and relatives. Whether  
they are rich or poor..."

(Qur'an 4:135)



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## Modified halal

In December 2010, an international workshop for Islamic scholars was held in Penang, Malaysia on the theme, 'Agribiotechnology: Shariah Compliance.' The little-publicised event was not attended by any of the NGOs in Malaysia with a background in biotech issues. A web report claimed that the workshop was "attended by high-ranking ulama from Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Iran, Malaysia and Indonesia and scientists from Malaysia, USA, Iran and Egypt." In fact, anyone with differing views from the organisers was not invited. The discussion was also limited to the halal/haram debate and, not surprisingly, resulted in a fatwa stating that GM is permissible in Islam.

The two-day workshop, organised by the Malaysian Biotechnology Information Centre and International Halal Integrity Alliance, concluded that genetic modification and GM products are halal as long as the sources from which they originate are halal. Exceptions are products derived from haram origin, which retain original characteristics that are not substantially changed. Furthermore, the fatwa makes the promotion of modern biotechnology and genetic engineering a fardh kifayah (collective obligation) because of their positive impacts on agriculture and the urgency of food security for Muslim populations. This resolution is clearly influenced by one-sided information about the benefits of biotechnology circulated by trans-national corporations and other vested interests.

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www.ifees.org.uk

"The creation of the heavens and the earth is a far greater matter than the creation of humankind. But most of humankind do not know it."  
(Qur'an 40:57)

## Shock as GM declared 'halal'

**Genetically modified (GM) crops are grown on over a billion hectares of farmland across the world and the biotech companies responsible are now targeting Muslim populations. The Shariah-compliance of GM is being discussed in a profit-motivated context, manipulating Islamic scholars into issuing highly controversial fatwas in support of GM. These discussions are failing to consider biotechnology from an Islamic perspective, ignoring not only the harm that GM causes to the environment but the way it undermines the integrity of God's creation.**



# Global Issues

## The GM Controversy

...from cover page

This includes the myth that GM foods are being cultivated to feed poor communities whereas the crops are primarily designed to maximise profits. By focusing simply on the halal/haram origin of the gene used in genetic engineering, the workshop ignores fundamental issues in the Islamic worldview.

### The biotech worldview

Biotechnology is based on a worldview that sees nature in separate parts and not as an organic whole, linked by a web of relationships - organisms, forests, ecosystems, societies. Consequently a forest can be destroyed to plant cash crops without taking into account the ecological balance and the binding interdependence between plants, animals, micro-organisms and people.

### The Islamic worldview

The reductionism on which genetic engineering is anchored is clearly inconsistent with the holistic approach of the Qur'an:

And the earth We have spread out; set thereon mountains firm and immovable; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance.  
[Qur'an, 15:19]

It is the fracturing of nature's balance and harmony by profit-driven corporations that is responsible for some of the environmental disasters confronting us today.

Genetic engineering undermines the integrity of God's creation. This technology has the power to break down fundamental genetic barriers, not only between species, but also between humans, animals and plants. Gene engineers are now snipping, inserting, recombining, editing and programming genetic materials. Animal and even human genes are inserted into the chromosomes of plants, fish and animals creating unimaginable transgenic life forms<sup>1</sup>. These scientists are trying to alter the very nature, essence and qualities of God's creation in clear violation of the Qur'anic injunction:

... (Establish) Allah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: **No change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by Allah...** [Qur'an, 30:30]

The Qur'an has also warned about Satan's intentions to mislead mankind:

...And surely I will lead them astray, and surely I will arouse desires in them, and surely I will command them and they will cut the cattle's ears, and surely I will command them and they will change Allah's creation. Whoso chooseth Satan for a patron instead of Allah is verily a loser and his loss is manifest. [Qur'an, 4:117-119]

### Rethinking GM fatwas

Fatwas should not be issued on GM without a hard look at the costs and possible benefits, if any. GM foods have not been proven to improve food security for the world's poor. There is no credible evidence to show that genetic modification has increased yields, reduced pesticide use or improved food nutrition. In fact, the crops that currently dominate the GM market do not include any of the staple foods that could benefit the developing world.

Genetic engineering is also inherently dangerous on many levels, not least because it involves breaking down species barriers using recombined versions of genetic parasites. This has the potential to create hazards such as new drug-resistant viruses and diseases.

Given the nature of genetic engineering, its dangers and its failure to fulfil the claims of its proponents, it is shocking that Islamic scholars and Muslim scientists could grant it halal status, and make its promotion a collective religious obligation of the ummah.

Islamic scholars must be wary of being manipulated by the biotech industry to give religious legitimacy to its products, and realise how aggressively this industry is trying to penetrate foreign markets. At the very least, Islamic scholars should consult both the supporters and opponents of agribiotechnology before giving their opinion. Ultimately, genetic engineering should be evaluated in the light of the Qur'anic verses that underpin the Islamic worldview to judge whether it promotes the aims of the Shariah - the protection of religion, life, mind, and posterity.

**Mohideen Abdul Kader**

Vice-president of the Consumer Association of Penang  
Malaysia

1. "What you should know about genetically modified foods", Consumer Association of Penang

Research has revealed that toxins implanted into GM food crops to kill pests are reaching the bloodstreams of women and unborn babies.

For findings please go to  
[www.gmwatch.org/index.php](http://www.gmwatch.org/index.php)

Also see - Aris A, Leblanc S. Maternal and fetal exposure to pesticides associated to genetically modified foods in Eastern Townships of Quebec, Canada. *Reprod Toxicol* (2011), doi:10.1016/j.reprotox.2011.02.004  
[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21338670](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21338670)

For a comprehensive overview of the GM issue see:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetically\\_modified\\_food](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetically_modified_food)