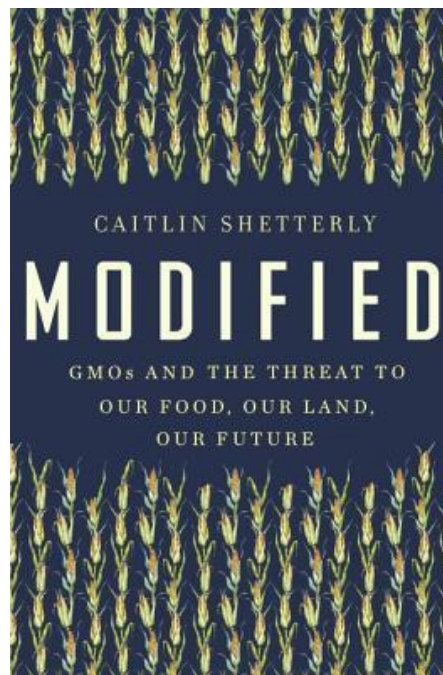




Modified: GMOs and the Threat to Our Food, Our Land, Our Future

Caitlin Shetterly

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A disquieting and meditative look at the issue that started the biggest food fight of our time--GMOs. From a journalist and mother who learned that genetically modified corn was the culprit behind what was making her and her child sick, a must-read book for anyone trying to parse the incendiary discussion about genetically modified foods.

GMO products are among the most consumed and the least understood substances in the United States today. They appear not only in the food we eat, but in everything from the interior coating of paper coffee cups and medicines to diapers and toothpaste. We are often completely unaware of their presence.

Caitlin Shetterly discovered the importance of GMOs the hard way. Shortly after she learned that her son had an alarming sensitivity to GMO corn, she was told that she had the same condition, and her family's daily existence changed forever. An expansion of Shetterly's viral *Elle* article "The Bad Seed," *Modified* delves deep into the heart of the matter—from the cornfields of Nebraska to the beekeeping conventions in Brussels—to shine a light on the people, the science, and the corporations behind the food we serve ourselves and our families every day. Deeper than an exposé, and written by a mother and journalist whose journey had no agenda other than to understand the nuance and confusion behind GMOs, *Modified* is a rare breed of book that will at once make you weep at the majestic beauty of our Great Plains and force you to harvest deep seeds of doubt about the invisible monsters currently infiltrating our food and our land and threatening our future.

Modified: GMOs and the Threat to Our Food, Our Land, Our Future Details

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From Reader Review Modified: GMOs and the Threat to Our Food, Our Land, Our Future for online ebook

Jane says

My Food for Thought book club has been asking to read a book on GMOs, so this month we are reading and discussing Modified.

This book contains a lot of science and science-y info, overwhelming me at times. A lot of it is opinion and nonscientific guesswork. I poked around and there is a lot of controversy over this author and her writing. I am deeply suspicious of Monsanto (and other big Ag business) and fully believe they silence people who have negative things to say about their products and business practices, but this book didn't convince me of anything. It asks many (depressing) questions but provides no answers. This is not a modern day Silent Spring because it is not scientifically persuasive enough.

The book also contains too much self indulgent meandering off topic ("There's something immediately nostalgic for me when I'm on a college campus; I loved being in college. Sometimes I can't believe it's been so long since I was walking around, my backpack slung over my shoulders, learning in such an open unfettered way. (p. 252)).

Jessica says

Shortly after she was married Caitlin Shetterly started getting sick with a variety of symptoms that didn't seem to point to an obvious illness. After her son was born it continued to get worse to the point where she was exhausted all the time and could barely do anything. Around the same time her son experienced some weird symptoms and his doctor thought it might be a corn allergy. Not long after that Caitlin finally saw a doctor who said he thought she might be having an allergy to the proteins created by the enterotoxins bred into GMO corn - and that was likely what her son had as well. But, in trying to cut GMO corn completely out of her diet proved harder than you might think - corn is in EVERYTHING - pretty much every processed food has some corn derivative in it. Shetterly's family had to basically grow and source local, non-GMO food and prepare it themselves, but once they did all of her symptoms stopped. After going through this traumatic experience, Shetterly wanted to dig into GMOs. What exactly are they? What do we know about how they affect humans? This book is the result of those questions. A very thorough, but easy to read explanation of the horror-show that is genetically modified organisms, or GMOs. This is a terrifying, yet must-read book that exposes how our government has allowed Monsanto and other biotech companies to mutate our food for huge profits.

Quotes I liked:

"[Dr. Mansmann] said he'd come to believe, in the years since GMOs were first introduced, that some people might be developing a kind of chronic allergic response that was caused not by the corn itself, but instead by the proteins created by both the enterotoxins, bred into the corn to make it pest-resistant, and the proteins created from making it 'Roundup Ready'..." (p.14)

"I find that people like to say that farmers have been 'genetically modifying' our food for ten thousand years. This is just not accurate...To emphasize, a GMO, most often, carries the genes from two different species - and only technology (except in rare occurrences) can make this happen. No farmer or plant breeder or botanist can do this outside of a lab. Again, GMOs can only be made in the laboratory. Nature will never

make a GMO on her own and you can't make one out in the field, no matter how brilliant a farmer you are." (p. 22)

"(Between 2001 and 2007, as GMO products took off, glyphosate use more than doubled; 180-185 million pounds of glyphosate were used in 2007. Some researchers estimate another doubling, at least, in the last decade, but it's hard for us to know because the Bush administration, openly friendly with the chemical companies, was reportedly persuaded to stop recording glyphosate sales in 2007.)" (p. 28-9)

"...back in 2002, during the African famine, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Zambia refused food aid from the United States because they did not want genetically modified corn. (Zambia's President Mwanawasa said, famously, 'Simply because my people are hungry, that is no justification to give them poison.')" (p. 98-9)

[Dave of Food Democracy Now!] "'It almost doesn't matter who's in the White House because it's been a corporate takeover of our government,' he said. 'This is gangster capitalism.' And then he elaborated further, 'There are six hundred corporate lobbyists controlling America. No one in the White House does.'" (p. 150-1)

"Ignacio said that a German importer had told him that he had hit a stumbling block in his importation business: In order to make sure his honey is GMO-free, he has to run some expensive PCR testing (testing for GMO DNA) to be sure the 'GMO-free' label is accurate. And the problem was that his drums were often contaminated. He told Ignacio that even a small amount of GMO DNA from just one family's operation could ruin a whole drum, in which he's already invested quite a bit of time and money. So Ignacio had asked the guy, 'Well, what do you do with it if it does have GMO DNA? Do you dump the honey into the sea or what?' And the guy says to Ignacio, 'Oh no. We just send it to the U.S. where people don't care.'" (p. 168-9)

"In Dashka Slater's *Mother Jones* piece, she wrote, 'Gender deformities were present among frogs exposed to as little as 0.1 part per billion (picture a thousandth of a grain of salt in a half gallon of water). That's thirty times less than the 3 ppb the EPA allows in our drinking water.' Indeed, some of Tyrone's studies were showing that atrazine, even at extremely low levels, was causing some male frogs to 'become' females - complete with female parts. This was an electrifying and terrifying discovery." (p. 294)

"Wendell Berry's famous words: 'You cannot regulate an abomination. You have got to stop it.'" (p. 306)

"[A 2014] study said that neonics are as dangerous as DDT and are affecting birds, fish, worms, pollinators, bugs - you name it. Their study also found that traces of neonics have been found in fruits, vegetables, cow's milk, and honey. This is the first comprehensive compendium that seems to point the finger, without a doubt, to the trouble neonics, used primarily on GMO crops, could be wreaking." (p. 323)

Mollie says

The narration was monotone to a degree; however, the information was very mind blowing. I may become a gardener. #foodie #whenthefoodrunsout #zombieapocalypse

Brittany says

I was given the chance to read the ARC of Modified by Caitlin Shetterly by Penguin's First to Read program in exchange for my honest review.

Modified by Caitlin Shetterly was extremely informative. That being said, I found it really tough to get through the book in a timely manner, which is ok, I just probably should not have chosen it for a book that needed to be read in a short amount of time. I think for a book like Modified which holds so much information, you really need to take it slow so you can absorb the facts and not suffer from information overload.

Many reviewers said they enjoyed her anecdotes and I can understand why, they lend a memoir-like tone to this very facts-oriented non fiction book. Caitlin's stance is very relatable, she wants to be as informed as possible so that she can make the best decisions for not only her own health which was negatively effected by GMO corn, but for the health of her children.

Overall, I look at this as a scientific non-fiction about GMOs and their possible effects on not only people, but animals and nature as we know it. If you are not invested in the topic, this is not for you. I was mildly interested and I found myself very bored at times, though some topics did peak my interest and made me want to learn more (the bees and honey!). Both sides of the GMO debate are explored and neither side is ridiculed, which I appreciate in a book that is written to inform. 4stars

Bam says

Many thanks to Penguin and their First To Read program for the opportunity to read this important new nonfiction book in which Caitlin Shetterly investigates GMOs and wide-spread pesticide usage in farming.

If given a choice, I tend to pick organic and chemical-free products after being diagnosed with an auto-immune disorder over twenty years ago and deciding to eliminate as many chemicals as possible from my lifestyle (hair dye, nail polish, harsh cleaning products, lawn and garden weed and pest killers etc.) So naturally, I've been concerned about genetically-engineered plants and the heavy use of pesticides that goes along with those. Consequently, I jumped at the chance to read this book and gain more knowledge about the subject.

Shetterly's personal health issues, and those of her infant son, are also behind her desire to educate herself about this topic and share what she has learned with readers. She is neither a doctor nor a scientist but began her investigation by interviewing experts, scientists and farmers on both sides of the issue. The end result of that was an article she wrote for Elle Magazine which appeared in the July, 2013 issue, and was entitled "The Bad Seed: The Health Risks of Genetically Modified Corn." Her article created a great deal of controversy and backlash from Big Ag and pro-GMO scientists but the editors at Elle stood by her--she had the proof of statements made to her on tape and they had done thorough fact-checking before publishing her article.

For her book, Shetterly has traveled across the US and Europe and talked to farmers, scientists, government agencies etc., to expand her knowledge of what is happening in the field of genetic engineering today and explore what dangers their widespread usage might pose to all of us. The real losers are our children and grandchildren if these Big Ag companies have gone too far. Already contamination to non-GMO crops is wide-spread, it seems. What will be the ultimate cost to the earth and all its creatures? It's time to educate ourselves as best we can on these important issues.

Boiling says

I came across this book after reading an interview of the author on Food52.

A quite an engaging book on GMOs and I did learn a lot - about American history, why GMOs came about (we have to admit that it seemed like the right decision at that point in time with food shortage and desire to conquer nature) and honey.

Even though, I am in science, I did not really analyse GMO foods that much because I do believe GMOs have their uses. This book gave me a comprehensive overview of GMOs.

I fully sympathize with the author when she fell sick because of GMOs and I can understand how most of conventional medicine cannot sometimes pinpoint the answer. At times like these, it is unpopular to say that you are affected by GMOs or something like that but I can say with experience that even the healthiest foods might cause some reaction (even if not an allergy) in several people.

I learnt a lot about these large corporations, actually, I was familiar with many of these companies and I am surprised at the amount of money they invest in controlling scientific research and lobbying.

The Negatives:

1. Her fear of big ag seem a little exaggerated and they are portrayed like some gangster style thugs. This does not serve her well because people can extrapolate this exaggeration to cast doubts on her credibility.
2. She writes that on her flight from Boston to Italy, she felt like she was not in US the moment she boarded the plane and that it was like a foreign country where she heard only Italian. She had to order her food on the flight by speaking 'italofranspanglish'. That seems like a complete exaggeration to me. You mean to tell me that there were no American tourists flying from Boston to Italy and even the air hostesses could not speak decent English when flying from USA?
3. She has tendencies to ramble away talking about another story or explaining the significance of some song/item in her life when starting off with one story. Sometimes, I forgot what she started on about.
4. Too many needless details. For example, p. 256 - "I had a light yellow spiral -bound notebook I'd bought at a dollar store back home for 99 cents" Does this really matter for the story or have a point? Not at all.

Despite all the negatives, I did like the book.

Note on the edition: It was good. Though I would have liked it better if the font had been a little larger.

Zivile says

I received this book through First To Read program.

I am very interested in GMO topic since the day I've started understanding the importance of food. This book has lots of versatile information, ranging from local American laws and cases to European experiences.

I was surprised to learn new things in this books because media covers GMO related stories pretty well. And then I realized how much I sill don't know. Especially, what kind of new diseases are appearing from the long-term exposure to certain GMO products.

I still meet a lot intelligent people who think GMO is nothing bad. But now I could recommend this book. The only minus I found in this book is the storytelling style: sometimes information would be represented in a (prefered) professional way and sometimes the story would be interfered by personal and (maybe) not so

important stories. That was very distracting, alas.

Mrs. Europaea says

I thought I knew a reasonable amount about GMO's yet after reading this I discovered my knowledge was just the tip of the biotechnological iceberg.

Shetterly makes this part memoir/part exposé work on a variety of levels. She doesn't get overly scientific to bore common readers but still manages to convey a range of facts that if one is curious about they can further research for themselves. I wouldn't say that this hurts her work by a lack of peer-reviewed resources, but it is easy for critics to dismiss it because she doesn't include many citations and relies on her interviews with professionals and academics.

I was shocked a good 1/3 of the book to see how ubiquitous GE has become and how it has spread into areas that not only did no one think about, but no one is talking about now that it is being revealed. I think the public's right to know is being deliberately lobbied against by the practice of gangster capitalism and I hope that more people become aware of this and start to demand transparency.

Zheluo Cai says

Modified is Caitlin Shetterly's personal journey in discovering the cause of her eosinophilia (a white blood cell disorder), which also plagued her preschool son. Written in a travelogue style and highly readable for any layperson, she courageously investigated a trail that led her to understand and conclude that GMO was possibly the cause of her illness. As the term implies, a GMO product has been genetically modified with DNA from another source; the alternative source could be an insect, an animal or another plant. Not only the DNA's protein is changed but pesticides are added genetically to fortify the new product, which looks exactly like the original produce, for example, corn, soy, fruits, vegetable, animal feed, etc. When bees collect pollen from the GMO-altered plant's flowers, honey is inevitably contaminated, and the GMO plants' DNA is dispersed to other non-GMO horticultural fields; the bees' life is shortened by the GMO's pesticide and colony collapse follows. Miss Shetterly meticulously tracked down both pro-GMO and anti-GMO activists, scientists, academicians, farmers in an effort to elucidate the complexities of the GMO debate, notwithstanding powerful opposition from multinational companies with deep pockets, as they attempt to suppress alternative views and research findings. It is totally reasonable to suspect that human DNA will inevitably be impacted by consuming GMO produce, if not for just the fact that pesticides are inherently present in most GMO products. This is a provocative read.

Sara Codair says

I don't read non-fiction trade books very often, but when I saw Modified: GMOs and the Threat to Our Food, Our Land, Our Future by Caitlin Shetterly come up on First To Read, I decided to request it. A couple weeks later, I had the book downloaded on Kindle Fire, and was very happy with my choice to read it. There was enough anecdote and narrative to keep the story-loving part of my mind engaged, and enough science to teach me something new. It was book that encouraged me to ask questions, not the kind that asks for trust and acceptance.

GMO's, like most controversies these days, are a very polarized argument. I really appreciated how Shetterly explored multiple facets of the issue, including some voices from both polar extremes and a lot of voices from the gray areas. Her book made me feel like I wasn't crazy for spending the extra money on organic or non-gmo products, but didn't shame me for opting for the cheaper products either. They gave a level headed voice to the science that is saying GMO's are dangerous, and have the opposition a chance to voice their opinions too, though I will say the anti-gmo science came out on top in this one.

Another thing I loved about this book was that one of the friendliest characters interviewed was a farmer who raised gmo crops. She's not demonizing anyone or attacking the people actually working in the fields, but the products being sold to them and the corporations whose greed is hurting all living creatures on the planet.

Modified was an enjoyable and thought provoking read that has raised a lot of questions for me, and has me rethinking the way I eat and shop. It's also got me motivated to take better care of my own garden as the dog days of summer drag on.

-Sara (www.saracodair.com)

Lauren says

I was privileged to be chosen as someone who was allowed to read this early through First To Read and I'm so glad I had the opportunity. The author beautifully expressed her feelings and research throughout this book and did a wonderful job citing her sources. In this country we have been trained to either be 100% for something or 100% against something and refuse to even attempt to find a middle ground *or* hear out "the other side." The author of this book has had her experiences professionally and personally, and even though it was very evident what her beliefs were in the book she made it a point to show both sides of the playing field when it comes to this topic.

This is a fantastic read and I hope that people will give it a fair chance. I know that the author is going to go through some hell because of this book but I appreciate all of her efforts and hope that maybe it will help to get some people to look a bit further into this topic instead of just refusing to acknowledge the legitimate issues and concerns revolving around genetically modifying our food.

Rachael Marsceau says

Very unprofessional writing style. DNF 60 pages in.

I received access to a free galley through the First to Read program.

Jenny T. says

As I eat my non-GMO corn, I can honestly say that I really didn't give much thought about this entire controversy but this book definitely taught me a lot about what chemical companies are doing with crops (corn, soybeans, & cotton) and it's possible impact on the environment (including bees & honey) and one's health. This quote from the book: "...It's really really hard to write about science in the same amount of

detail as a scientist, who knows the terrain, can explain science, and can make sure we understand every possibility,” sums up my view that although this was an interesting read, I felt that I had to take the author’s word with skepticism. I appreciate how the author presented her own personal story and included representatives from all sides (farmers, university scientists, etc.) Also my e-copy could not be enlarged so I had to read a very tiny font which made this a difficult read and unable to read any of the footnotes. Thanks to First to Read- Penguin Books USA for the free copy of this book.

KC says

A lengthy but thought provoking collection of data from Caitlin Shetterly about the GMO issue. After she and her son were diagnosed with food sensitivities, this journalist and mother went on a journey of discovery. It's quite a scary outlook for our future generations.

Michelle says

A great baseline explanation of GMO foods, seeds, and products. I would love to see a follow up to this book that provides a detailed explanation of the food and lifestyle changes the author undertook to go GMO free.
