

IFAS Matters



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IFAS Matters - August 2014

Posted on August 27, 2014 by Jack Payne

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GMOs? OMG!

A curious thing happened to me at a Climate Change and Sustainability conference at Oxford University this month. It was a roundtable format featuring a gaggle of scholars from 12 countries, representing disciplines ranging from agronomy to architecture and engineering. Our mission was to decry, dissect, and unravel some of the debilitating effects of climate change.

Most participants railed against “climate change deniers” and the effect they had on the mitigation progress and process. Correspondingly, there was a resounding consensus that climate change models and studies are based on good science. For the most part, everyone seemed to get along swimmingly until the conversation turned to GMOs. Then the group’s mood abruptly changed from a like-minded coterie of climate change crusaders to a peevish posse of anti-GMO vigilantes.

As it turns out, there was a remarkable number of otherwise scientifically-minded participants who trusted the science that

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substantiates climate change but *distrusted the science that corroborates the safety and efficacy of GMOs*. I wasn't as much surprised as I was disheartened. I've seen it before. The same folks who are fighting the climate change wars, working mightily to preserve the planet, can be some of the very same people who fear and loath GMOs. It's a classic case of SSDD (Same Science, Different Dudes). SSDD strikes when ideology and not methodology guides a search for truth. We, as a people, tend to live by our belief systems and when our beliefs, whether they be religious, political, social or whatever, bump up against facts as discovered through the scientific method, we tend to reject the facts.

Good science isn't always convenient. It doesn't offer the shortcuts and quick gratification of media hype and provocative untested claims.

If done right, though, science helps us develop a common set of facts. We can then have honest disagreements about the best public policy response to the facts. Using science à la carte prevents us from even agreeing which questions need to be answered.

Scientists have a special responsibility to stick to evidence. What I saw in Oxford was disheartening because it showed me how far we are from the finish line in the race to address a grand challenge. In fact, it told me that we aren't even at the same starting line.

-Jack



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