

FRANKENSTEIN FOODS

American consumers should disregard European fears over genetically modified crops

As resistance to genetically modified crops in Europe grows, American farmers face an even more depressed profit margin this year. Ironically, the smaller profits are due to the effectiveness of engineered products which most American farmers grow. The better a genetically manipulated (GM) crop can stand pests and herbicides, the more produce is harvested, driving prices down.

Now that the Europeans have all but banned these crops, the market for American farmers has gotten even shakier. It is unfair that Europe would make a short-sighted judgment on genetically engineered products. There has been no scientific proof that GM crops are really any different from organic foods or that they are harmful in any way.

The dislike of GM crops is almost entirely fueled by unwarranted fear of genetic changes in crops, prejudice against American farmers and accusations of American imperialism, rather than real scientific proof that GM crops are dangerous. One can see why people could be hesitant in accepting GM foods.

In this overpopulated, over-polluted world, organic foods may seem like the only chance a person has to get back to a "simple" life.

Nothing could be worse for farmers. Consumers went back to the simple life of organic foods, farmers would lose millions of dollars during a time when most farmers are struggling as it is.

Most Americans rarely think about the source of the foods they eat — whether cornchips are produced from genetically altered corn, or if tomatoes are modified to resist pests.

This is due to a fairly well developed



BEVERLY MIRELES



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

trust in the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the regulators behind the government organization.

But due to the mad cow disease scare, Europe, and especially England, has a weakened faith in many government regulations. Now that fear comes at the expense of American farmers.

The thought of genetically engineered foods may have a science fiction-like quality about them, but they are very beneficial, whether packaged into baby food (as soy) or as taco shells (corn).

Currently, no produce or products

that include GM foods require a label in the United States. However, if England, France and a few interest groups in America had their way, all GM foods would be separated from more organic products and labeled.

Resentment and fear of GM crops in Europe has crossed the Atlantic and started a tariff war, and while publicity about these "Frankenstein foods" gets more fevered, it is a war no one is likely to win. However, farmers are not the only ones losing.

Because Europeans refuse to buy

American GM crops, the United States has hiked up import taxes, meaning that in order to keep the dollars flowing, one might have to pay much more for imported cheeses, perfumes, Land Rovers and other imported products.

Imposing taxes signal more than just trade disagreements in the financial market. At this rate, it seems almost certain that the tariff battle being waged will eventually affect the way most Americans feel about the food they buy every day. Therefore, the promotional campaign from Europe, Greenpeace,

and many interest groups is so dangerous to farmers, if not handled correctly.

Thus far, Americans have not minded if their corn was genetically engineered or not, but will they once they hear of the Europeans call for all organic foods?

The European stigma on GM foods is not fueled so much by fear of displacement by Americans on the international food market.

According to a Newsweek article, a merger between Carrefour and Promodes, two main buyers of French produce, has set the new company to compete with American firms like Wal-Mart. If anything, this means that there will be even more pressure on European farmers, fueling even more protest.

Cultural and economic fears have driven some Europeans to extremes with organic foods, sometimes even resorting to violence. But it is imperative that Americans do not follow their lead.

Unfortunately, there have already been signs of reactionary behavior.

One unnamed group, destroyed a test bed of genetically engineered corn at the University of Maine, and credited the vandalism to the "seeds of resistance."

In a less violent maneuver, a Berkeley, Calif. school board has announced a ban on GM foods. Though the odds of this new ruling sparking similar bans from other school boards are slim, the precedent has been set.

Though fear of GM foods run rampant on the other side of the Atlantic, Americans must be more logical about the genetically modified foods situation.

Otherwise, the trend that was started with the blackballing of GM foods in Europe will soon spread to the United States, hurting not only American farmers, but American commerce, as well.

Beverly Mireles is a junior microbiology major.

Much ado about funding

College of Liberal Arts cannot neglect old departments for sake of building new performance studies program

Vision 2020 was organized in 1997 to raise the level of the college's ten universities. Imperative for the plan is the need for the expansion and increased prominence of the College of Liberal Arts. While much work still remains to be done, one early step in the name of Vision 2020 could possibly be taken at A&M in the long direction.

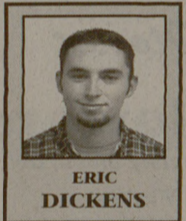
Last week, the college created a Department of Performance Studies, a combination of existing theater arts and music programs hopes to increase the visibility of the population of fields at A&M.

The University added to the absence of a music major, a typically well-established component of the nation's top schools, so the attention of the new department became a top priority.

Now that the absence has been at least partially filled, care needs to be taken to ensure sufficient resources are still allocated to existing, larger departments. Certainly the College of Liberal Arts will not simply forget about its other departments, but the potential for them to be financially overlooked is real.

According to Dr. Woodrow Jones, dean of the College of Liberal Arts, money from alumni is most useful in the growth of the college. However, most of the money tends to go toward the fine arts and the new Department of Performance Studies.

With approximately 600 ma-



ERIC DICKENS

jors each, the history, journalism and English departments already have a toe-hold in the long climb ahead to becoming nationally exemplary programs.

And while these larger departments have their own merits and laurels, they have been rated poorly in a number of national reviews. In the U.S. News and World Report's 1998 ranking of the nation's Ph.D. programs, the English department's came in 62nd while the doctorate program in history was not even ranked.

increased support in state funding and, more importantly, alumni donations.

Unfortunately, creating a new department could turn out to be just another hungry mouth for the college's budget to feed.

The money that will inevitably go to the new performance studies department could be better spent on building the best faculty, attracting new students and improving the graduate and doctoral programs for the established departments in the College of Liberal Arts.

If more money and time are invested into the growth of the English, history and other larger departments, they have real chances at becoming some of the best in the nation.

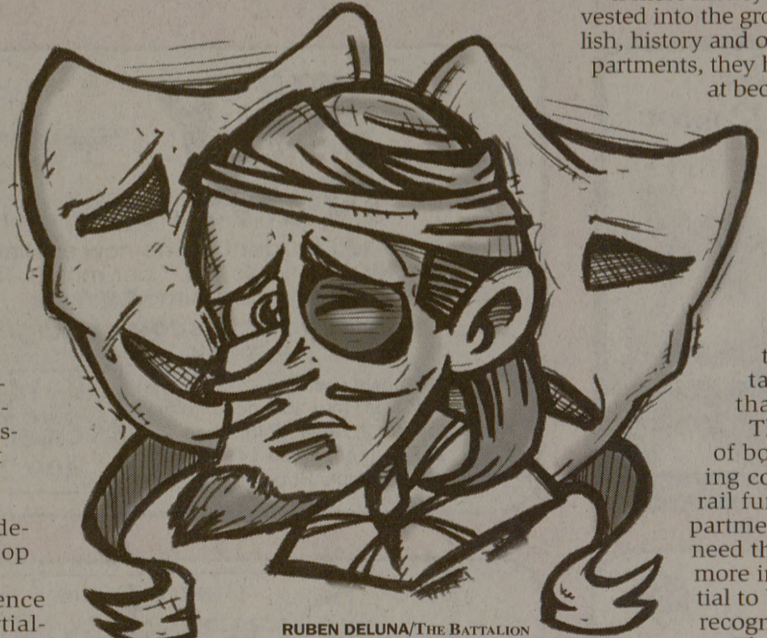
Meanwhile, raising the Department of Performance Studies from its present infancy to respectable national status will take much longer than two decades.

The difficult job of boosting its ranking could work to derail funds from the departments that still need them and have more immediate potential to be nationally recognized.

The need for a drastically improved liberal arts college is very basic to the future success of A&M, and Vision 2020's plan for establishing a comprehensive study of the arts is a very important one.

However, if the push to develop the new Department of Performance Studies overshadows the needs of the more well-established departments, then valuable alumni donations and other resources will continue to be misapplied with good intentions.

Eric Dickens is a junior English major.



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MIKE LUCKKICH ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

MAIL CALL

Unions should not draft standards

In response to Caleb McDaniel's Sept. 8 column.

As an "embattled" teacher of nearly a decade, I take issue with parts of McDaniel's opinion that teachers should unionize to "fix educational standards."

Innovative teachers are not limited by teaching TAAS skills. On the contrary, these skills form a foundation from which additional real life skills are taught to students so they might succeed outside of school as well as in the academic arena.

McDaniel hails Sandra Feldman's proposal that school and unions "draft contracts together outlining general teacher expectations." Unfortunately, the local community is left out of this decision-making process.

Those who are most directly involved with the lives of students, including responsible students themselves, should be the ones making the decisions and not

unions that may be headquartered in other states.

I realize McDaniel may not have had the opportunity to acquire much classroom experience. As a teacher, I applaud his effort to lend a hand in improving the educational experience of students. However, one would be wise to accumulate several years of public school teaching experience before attempting to champion a cause in the field.

Janet Kamps
Class of '88

structure far more simple and efficient, dealing effectively with the Soviet threat and massive federal deregulates that acted as potent stimulants to the wealth creating private sector.

In addition, his wit and confidence in America helped the country believe in itself again after the dark days of the 1970s. Although the column was not about our most popular ex-President, it never hurts to recognize a good man who did a great deal for his country.

Jonathan Jones
Class of '02

Reagan supporter defends presidency

In response to Beverly Mireles' Sept. 10 column.

Mireles twice asserts that "Reagan was not that great of a president." Really?

Among his many presidential accomplishments, President Reagan was directly involved in improving and expanding a demoralized military, making the tax

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