Genetically engineered food is a new reality

"These are magic beans that will bring you fortune." As the story goes, Jack went home and showed the beans to his mother who called him a fool for putting his faith in a bag of "magic" beans. Frustrated and angry, she tossed them out the window sending Jack to bed. Every American knows the end of this fictional story having heard it as a child, but as it turns out, this might not be a fairy tale anymore.

TIM DYLL

Genetic engineering long has been regarded as the future of food production, and now, it has become a reality. By altering the genetic makeup of plants, scientists can produce healthier crops and more of them. Open any kitchen cupboard or look on any restaurant's menu, chances are, they are full of products enhanced by food production companies to be cheaper, healthier and better.

Over the years, these companies have used technology for the benefit of mankind by making our food healthier, cheaper and more abundant than ever. This burden is not taken lightly, and because of the current economy, cost conscious consumers have become more aware than ever of the price of food.

New farming techniques yield more produce, newly discovered hormones allow cows to produce more milk and new sterilization techniques make our food cleaner. It only seems logical that genetic engineering is the next step in food production technology.

To maintain or lower the cost of food in the United States, many companies are turning to genetically engineered foods as their next resource. The FDA passed regulations for genetically engineered foods in 1992 and again in 2001.

Both times, they saw very little danger in letting research continue without interference. Genetically engineered foods are healthier, heartier and more nutritious than organic foods and can be produced for less money. They will make a powerful weapon against world hunger and will play an important role in feeding our ever-growing population.

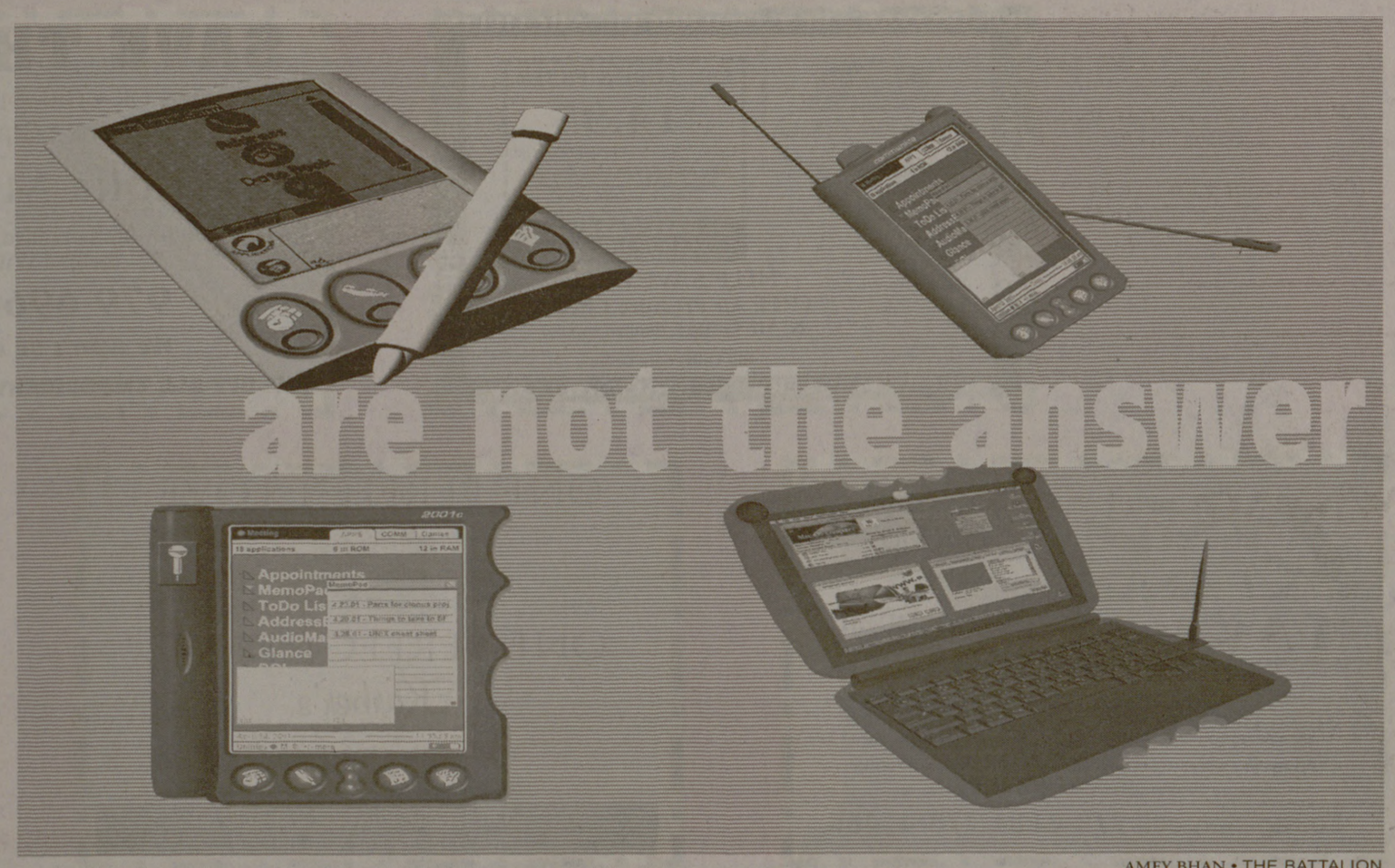
Opponents of genetically engineered food should try living for a few weeks on an empty stomach, before condemning the foods as unsafe. A genetically engineered ear of corn might not look so bad after a month of starvation. Green Peace, the group made famous by the "Save the Whales" campaign in the mid 80s, is one of the strongest opponents of genetically engineered foods.

Its Website cites allergic reactions as one of the main evils of genetic engineering. It claims that because people potentially could become allergic to genetic foods, then their production should be stopped. A lot of people are allergic to peanuts,but doe as that mean a "Save the Peanuts" campaign should be mounted?

It is idiotic to mount a campaign aimed at better food production methods. Who is the bigger fool? Jack for putting his faith in some magic beans or his mother for throwing them out the window?

Tim Dyll is a senior electrical engineering major.

Expensive laptops ... are not the answer



AMEY BHAN • THE BATTALION

Gone are the days of simple back-to-school shopping, the crisp feel of unused notebooks and the pristine sharpness of No. 2 pencils, that somehow yielded inexplicable feelings of excitement regarding the upcoming school year. Instead, a new and more costly back-to-school necessity has emerged for students of the new millennium.

JENNIFER LOZANO

Laptops, one icon of the 21st century, have reared their ugly heads in the classroom. For many students, in public and private schools alike, laptops are becoming as imperative to education as textbooks and pencils. New programs, provided by the Anytime, Anywhere Learning program and headed by the Microsoft Corp., are giving laptops to students as young as fourth graders, to be toted around school and taken home at the end of the day.

Despite the overzealous opinions of techno-junkies and computer corporations around the world, it is highly doubtful that $2,000 laptops, plus the many other expenses and problems generated by this program, are going to make a significant difference in the big picture of education.

The idea behind providing laptops for students is idealistic. Administrators hope to end the "digital divide" between students from wealthier families and students from lower income families and help students apply computer skills to their learning experience as a whole.

According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, advocates said laptops "have an egalitarian effect on classrooms, replacing top-down, lecture-based teaching with collaborative, student-led projects."

Early research suggests improvements in student writing and attendance. Students also appear to be more excited about their class work.

However, the results of these reports easily could be attributed to simultaneous improvements in the curricula that existed independent of the laptop programs.

Many critics feel that the excitement with which student's greeted the laptops' arrivals will wear off, and administrators will be forced to search for a new, more expensive way to entice kids to learning.

The most obvious problem with supplying students with laptops is the expenses that incur for a public school district.

In Bloomfield, Conn., Carmen Arace Middle School has given every student — all 850 of them — a laptop computer and installed wireless networks in every classroom. This program was financed by a $2.1-million, five-year plan with NetSchools. To support this state-of-the-art learning environment, large sums of money were spent training educators, installing wireless networks, rebuilding courses to match the introduction of the Internet, and hiring on-site computer technicians.

According to *The New York Times*, even Jerry Crystal, the technology coordinator for the Bloomfield district who directed the laptop program, is conducting an intense evaluation of the Carmen Arace Middle School to find out "exactly what students are getting in return for those $500,000 checks the school board has written each year."

Even in elite private schools, where laptops in the classroom originated, many voices of dissent have been heard.

At Lakeside School in Seattle, Wash. alma mater of Bill Gates and one of the first private schools to implement laptops, one parent, who is a computer engineer, said, "If there is an academic deficit, it's that students can't do critical reasoning and can't analyze. These capabilities have nothing to do with a piece of machinery."

Unfortunately, our society could end up with a generation of "cut-and-paste kids" who cannot rely on their analytical skills or imagination because they never were developed in their youth. As it appears, laptops in the classroom pose significantly more questions than they do answers.

Carmen Arace Middle School and Lakeside School do not stand alone in the growing number of both public and private schools implementing laptops into their curricula. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "200,000 children nationwide carry laptops in their school backpacks every day."

However, technological changes do not mean the needs of children have changed. Technology is a huge part of our everyday lives, but that does not mean every child in grades four through 12 needs a personal laptop. In fact, technology will change so much by the time kids graduate, that what they learn at school will have almost no relevance to what they encounter in the workplace.

Instead of spending taxpayer dollars on laptops, school districts should consider improving the quality and quantity of the more affordable stand-alone personal computer and applying computer usage to the study of traditional courses. When problems suffocate the benefits of advanced technology, there is something to be said for simplicity and tradition.

One Lakeside parent summed it up perfectly by saying, "Kids already have 24-hour access to learning. It's called books."

Jennifer Lozano is a junior English major.

EDITORIAL

Texas A&M University — Celebrating 125 Years

THE BATTALION

SERVING THE TEXAS A&M COMMUNITY SINCE 1893

Where to Place the Extra Money?

Southerland, SSFAB should listen to A&M students

Accounting may prove to be a difficult course for administrators as it is for students. The University has an extra $1.1 million on its hands, part of the Student Services Fee that originally was budgeted to support Bus Operations before the student body voted in favor of a separate transportation fee. As the questions arise of where and how this money should be be allotted, one point must remain clear — the student body must have a strong voice in the outcome of the decision.

This means that the decision makers, Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. J. Malon Southerland and the Student Services Fee Advisory Board (SSFAB), must make a more conscious and deliberate effort to ensure that the students who voted to create this surplus have influence over how the funds are distributed.

Compared to the Texas A&M System's multi-billion dollar budget, $1.1 million may not seem outstanding, but in a time of budget crunching because of rising utility costs and looming decreases in state funding, A&M has reported facing a $6 million budget shortfall. In this light, the fee surplus is, after all, significant.

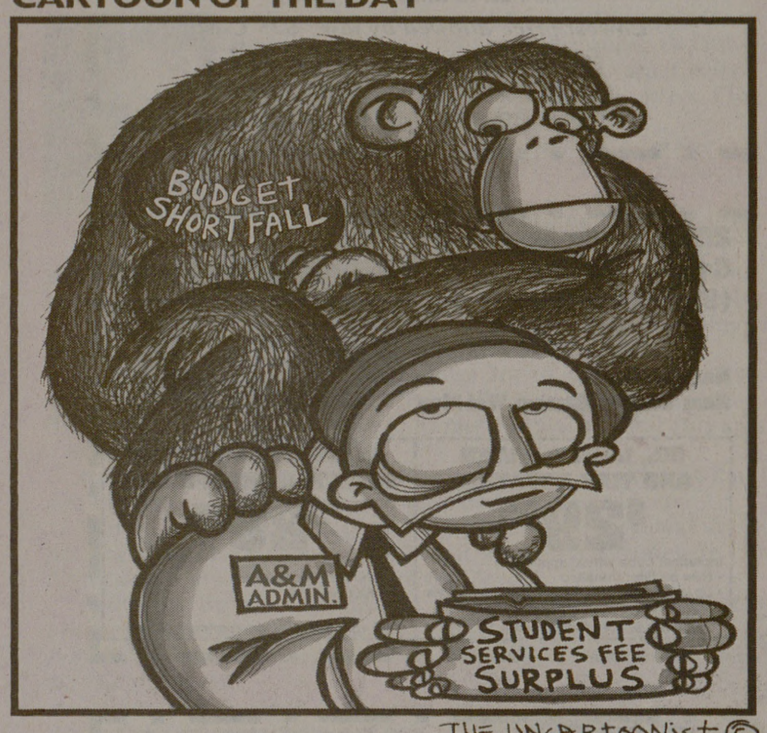
Students should take it upon themselves to remain informed of developments in the debate about how this money should be spent, and students should expect that the administration will continue to be forthcoming with proposals.

The University has expressed interest in using the surplus toward the construction of a student leadership retreat center. Other possibilities include spreading the surplus around other student services, many of which are underfunded.

Making an educated suggestion to the SSFAB, composed of students, is a challenge that requires students to think about how this surplus in a sea of debt can be spent. In turn, the SSFAB has the duty to lobby Southerland and the administration on behalf of popular student sentiment.

Southerland should take the committee's input into consideration, that should in turn heed the will of the student body. The money comes from the students, and the ongoing effort to make A&M a top public university will not happen without their cooperative support.

CARTOON OF THE DAY



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