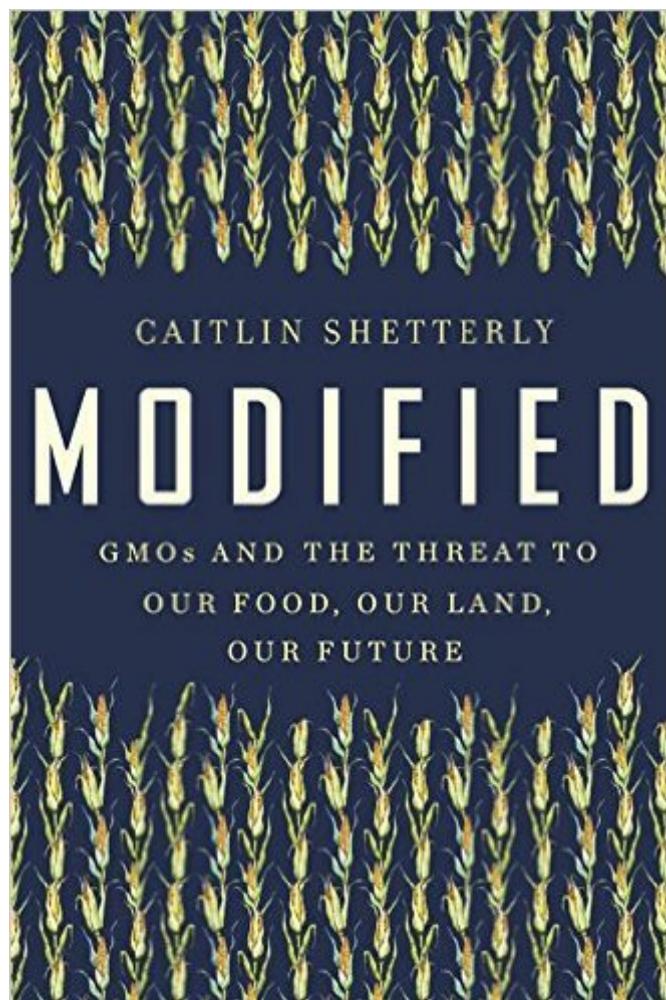


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Modified: GMOs And The Threat To Our Food, Our Land, Our Future



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

Hardcover: 352 pages

Publisher: G.P. Putnam's Sons (September 20, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0399170677

ISBN-13: 978-0399170676

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1.1 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (23 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #22,562 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Nutrition > Genetically Engineered Food #6 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Bioengineering > Biotechnology #11 in Books > Science & Math > Agricultural Sciences > Crop Science

Customer Reviews

For research to be statistically powerful, you have to have a large population to study. This is generally described with the algebraic term "n." You need a large enough n to demonstrate whether your hypothesis is true or false. In this case, the author starts out with a premise that GMOs are potentially harmful, but she demonstrates this to herself with an n of 2, herself and her child. She then investigates, doing so in an appropriately journalistic manner, and finds all manner of problems with Big Agriculture. And they may truly be problems. What we don't know at the end of the story is whether GMOs are bad in general. Let's just say, hypothetically, that GMOs are actually beneficial for most people but bad for a few; that is, they increase morbidity for a tiny fraction of the overall population. And let's say that a more natural approach to food might result in other morbidities to an even larger fraction of the population. It's possible, and the text here doesn't disprove that hypothesis. So in the end, we can't say that GMOs are bad. That said, having read the book, the concerns are certainly valid and now need substantiation through statistically meaningful research. What Shetterly has done is raise awareness through well reasoned journalism based upon observation of a single family pair's response to a now omnipresent entity, raising the question as to whether the means of obtaining a consistent and plentiful food supply has brought with it the potential for significant damage. So the book represents the beginning of a scientifically investigatory process, and so long as it is read within that context, it's an excellent start

If you are in search of a book that explains the dangers of GMOs, this is not the book for you. This is more of a collection of the learning of the writer as she personally traveled, learned about GMOs and the companies that produce them, how family members reacted to GMOs (allergies, etc.). She does give information about GMOs, and it's a fairly well balanced look at what she learned. However, by no stretch is this a scientific book, so start elsewhere if you want to learn the ins and outs of GMOs. It is a well written and interesting book, just not what I had expected.

For me, at least, this book fell into a gap. There are (many) books out there that discuss GMOs, pesticides, and the human health effects of them. And there are plenty of first-person travelogues that involve extensive exploration of 'flyover country' and chats with locals. This book professes to be an examination (and questioning) of the consequences of our heavy cultivation of GM food and heavy insecticide use AND a sort of diary of/blog about the author's circumstances and travels. But I think that the two projects do not combine well to form a coherent and informative whole. Readers who know much of anything about GMOs and current agricultural practices won't learn much from reading this book. (And they would, I think, learn a lot more from reading one of the many books on

these topics written by authors with some solid science background.) Readers who find the writer's circumstances compelling may find her travelogue interesting. But I didn't. The descriptions of scenery, natural features, and farms were...well, familiar, and generally less than insightful. I thus did not enjoy having to plow through so much of the author's personal observations to get to the discussion of GMOs. I also think that the book is mistitled: it is less about GMOs themselves and more about the author's personal experiences with them.

I am in favor of labeling GMO food products. I believe in the right of the consumer to make her or his own choice. With that said, I found myself wincing a bit too often after reading *Modified: GMOs and the Threat to Our Food, Our Land, Our Future*, by Caitlin Shetterly. Here's what I didn't like. Shetterly applied her investigative talents unevenly when reporting on the GMO issue. For example, she tried to get the reader to understand the people behind the anti-GMO movement, but when talking with the pro-GMO people, she seemed to focus more on the connection between them and industry. There was an undercurrent of fear as she worried that she was being monitored or followed by GMO proponents. And frankly, she wasn't very critical of scientists who agreed with her, but was very critical of those who were. I am a big Rachel Carson fan, and I think that Shetterly's continual reference to Carson and her influence insinuated that Shetterly was forging a similar path in regards to GMOs. However, Carson was influential because she got the science right. There were no chinks in *Silent Spring* for the pesticide industry to tear down her arguments. I kept thinking about the concept of "confirmation bias" throughout...

An interesting memoir that leans towards an education in GMO. I don't doubt Shetterly's facts or research but it is definitely "me" driven as opposed to whole research driven. She is definitely not as tough on folks who agree with her but in all fairness, their answers do often seem more logical. This won't be a definitive book on GMOs but it is well-written and interesting for the "lay person" who prefers a more personal approach to the subject.

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