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Description

In 1993, a biotech company introduces a tomato genetically-engineered to delay rot, thus allowing these tomatoes to ripen on the vine and, says the company, retain flavor.

Keywords

Tomato, Tomatoes, Genetic Engineering, Gene, Genes, Gene Function, Ripe, Ripen, Vine-Ripened, Rot, Rotting, Spoilage, Artificial Ripening, Gas, Ethylene, Green Tomatoes, Fresh Tomatoes, Garden Tomatoes, Garden, Taste, Flavor, DNA, Chemical DNA, Fertilized Egg, Species, Cross-Species, Cotton, Weedkiller, Dose, Rapeseed, Oil, Saturated Fats, Goats, Milk, Medicine, Pigs, Blood, Blood Transfusions, Disease, Cure, Grocery Store, Produce Section, Agriculture, Tomato Crop, Tomato Production, Designer Tomatoes, Seasonal, Year-Long, Corn, Strawberries, Diet, Cooking, Food, Chef, Boycott, Fear, Long-Term Effects, USDA-Approved, USDA, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration, FDA, Laboratory, Greenhouse, Field, Calgene, "Flavor-Saver Tomato", Market Share,
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CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE  

Transcript
Genetic Engineering of Tomatoes Is Fruitful, Says Company  
STONE PHILLIPS, anchor:  
SCIENCE WATCH now: This is tomato season, time to enjoy one of summer's greatest pleasures--vine-ripened tomatoes, fresh from the garden. But why can't they taste that good all year-round? Well, that day may be coming soon, through genetic engineering. Sounds like heaven to some, but others have their doubts. NBC science correspondent Robert Bazell:  
ROBERT BAZELL reporting:  
Alida Lessard of Saint James, New York, like millions of Americans, has spent much of the summer in her garden, and is now enjoying the harvest--especially the tomatoes.  
Ms. ALIDA LESSARD: If you pick it and eat it right there in the garden in the warm sun, it's got a flavor that's--that's very good!  
BAZELL: A bit of that late summer joy will be spread throughout the year starting this fall, if one is to believe the CEO of Calgene about the potential of the company's new genetically engineered tomato.  
Mr. ROGER SALQUIST (Calgene Chief Executive Officer): It's a piece of the diet that people have been missing for years--good-tasting tomatoes.  
BAZELL: Tomatoes, of course, are already available all winter. But to avoid spoilage farmers in Florida pick them green then ripen them with ethylene gas, yielding a product that many believe tastes more like cardboard than tomatoes.

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Mr. SALQUIST: We found the gene that produces the substance that naturally makes a tomato rot.

BAZELL: Using the tools of genetic engineering, scientists at Calgene were able to turn off the rotting gene, allowing the tomato to stay fresh seven to 10 days longer. As a result, Calgene's Flavr Savr tomato will be picked when it is turning red on the vine and brought to market without gassing. Salquist predicts consumers will notice a dramatically better taste.

Mr. SALQUIST: You know, this is a $4 billion market, and we're interested in--in getting a small piece of that.

BAZELL: In genetic engineering, scientists manipulate the chemical DNA which carries the information--the genes--that specify what a living thing is and how it functions. The technology is being used in attempts to solve many problems, especially curing human disease.

By inserting human DNA into a fertilized egg, researchers have produced patented goats whose milk contains drugs that could be used to treat human illness. And they have created and patented pigs with blood that might someday be used in human transfusions, and carried out thousands of other experiments. But for now, the new tomato is getting much of the skeptical attention.

Nora Poullion is one of 2500 prominent chefs who have signed a letter promising to boycott the Flavr Savr and other genetically engineered foods.

Ms. NORA POULLION: We don't know what kind of effect it will have on the next generation--I mean, starting to play around with different genes from different species--I mean, I think that sounds sort of scary.

BAZELL: Most scientists dismiss such fears as `misinformed' and `groundless.' The Food and Drug Administration and the US Department of Agriculture have approved the Flavr Savr.

Mr. ALVIN YOUNG (Agriculture Department): We know exactly what we're doing. We've evaluated it very carefully--first in the laboratory, then in the greenhouse and then in the field.

BAZELL: Biotechnology companies are working on dozens of new agricultural products, including cotton that would withstand greater doses of weed killer and rape seed with oil lower in saturated fat. The genetically engineered tomatoes will cost more, but if consumers accept them, much of the industry's attention will turn to making more produce available year-round. Imagine fresh corn, strawberries, and peaches on the shelves in February. The scientists are predicting that genetic engineering will bring an endless summer to the supermarket. Robert Bazell, NBC News, Davis, California.