



# future tense

ASU | NEW AMERICA | SLATE

THE CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO THE FUTURE

« OLDER

Teens Hate Twitter, World Leaders Love It

NEWER »

The Government Just Decided Google Isn't an Illegal Monopoly. Here's Why.

## Leading Environmental Activist's Blunt Confession: I Was Completely Wrong To Oppose GMOs

By *Torie Bosch* | Posted Thursday, Jan. 3, 2013, at 2:27 PM ET

SOCIAL OFF
 Like
 Tweet 746
 EMAIL
 PRINT
 COMMENT 248



Anti-Monsanto activists in Germany in 2009  
Photo by NIGEL TREBLIN/AFP/Getty Images

If you fear genetically modified food, you may have Mark Lynas to thank. By his own reckoning, British environmentalist helped spur the anti-GMO movement in the mid-'90s, arguing [as recently at 2008](#) that big corporations' selfish greed would threaten the health of both people and the Earth. Thanks to the efforts of Lynas and people like him, governments around the world—especially in Western Europe, Asia, and Africa—have hobbled GM research, and NGOs like Greenpeace have spurned donations of genetically modified foods.

But Lynas has changed his mind—and he's not being quiet about it. On Thursday at the Oxford Farming Conference, Lynas delivered a blunt address: He got GMOs wrong. According to [the version of his remarks posted online](#) (as yet, there's no video or transcript of the actual delivery), he opened with a bang:

I want to start with some apologies. For the record, here and upfront, I apologise for having spent several years ripping up GM crops. I am also sorry that I helped to start the anti-GM movement back in the mid 1990s, and that I thereby assisted in demonising an important technological option which can be used to benefit the



Follow
 RSS

### TIPS? → CONTACT US

*Will Oremus* is the lead blogger for Future Tense, reporting on emerging technologies, tech policy, and digital culture. Future Tense is a project from Slate, the New America Foundation, and Arizona State University.



**2013 Labor Law Posters**  
Guaranteed Low Prices For All 2013. Get Your Compliance Posters Here!  
[laborlawposter.us](http://laborlawposter.us)

**Do Not Buy Car Insurance**  
New policies allow you to legally reduce your car insurance by 50%  
[www.financialfavorite.com](http://www.financialfavorite.com)

**Class Action Attorneys**  
Unpaid Overtime Claims. Call for a free consultation (800) 796-0849  
[www.FloridaWageLaw.com](http://www.FloridaWageLaw.com)

**New&Used Office Furniture**  
Your one stop shop for Office Furniture, Best Prices, Service, Quality  
[www.tvoinu2u.com](http://www.tvoinu2u.com)

SPONSORED LINKS

### SLATE ON FACEBOOK

Like You and 243,051 others like this. 243,051 people



**Discover Slate With Your Friends**  
See what your friends are reading and automatically share how you're browsing *Slate*. You control what gets published to your Facebook News Feed.

ENABLE SOCIAL READING

You need to be logged into Facebook to see your friends' recent activity.

**Slate** **Boehner Wins New Term as Speaker, in Maximally Humiliating Fashion**  
626 people recommended this.

**The Stigma of Dubbing in Movie Musicals**

environment.

As an environmentalist, and someone who believes that everyone in this world has a right to a healthy and nutritious diet of their choosing, I could not have chosen a more counter-productive path. I now regret it completely.

So I guess you'll be wondering—what happened between 1995 and now that made me not only change my mind but come here and admit it? Well, the answer is fairly simple: I discovered science, and in the process I hope I became a better environmentalist.

His honest assessment of his heretofore poor understanding of the issue continues for almost 5,000 words—and it's a must-read for anyone who has ever hesitated over conventional produce. To vilify GMOs is to be as anti-science as climate-change deniers, he says. To feed a growing world population (with an exploding middle class demanding more and better-quality food), we must take advantage of all the technology available to us, including GMOs. To insist on "natural" agriculture and livestock is to doom people to starvation, and there's no logical reason to prefer the old ways, either. Moreover, the reason why big companies dominate the industry is that anti-GMO activists and policymakers have made it too difficult for small startups to enter the field.

"In the history of [#environmentalism](#), has there ever been a bigger mea culpa than that given here?" *Discover* blogger Keith Kloor tweeted. (Kloor recently called GMO foes "the climate skeptics of the left" in *Slate*.)

I can't think of another environmentalist. But it does call to mind another turnabout. In 2002, medical writer Arthur Allen penned a *New York Times Magazine* story titled "The Not-So-Crackpot Autism Theory." The piece suggested there might indeed be a link between autism and vaccination, and its publication in an outlet so mainstream as the *New York Times* gave the previously fringe theory more credibility. But soon after the article's publication, more and more published research effectively confirmed that [there is no link](#). Allen took that research seriously. A 2009 *Times* article about the book *Autism's False Prophets* said of Allen: "He later changed his mind and now 'feels bad' about the [magazine] article, he said, 'because it helped get these people into the field who did a lot of damage.' "

He began writing extensively about the dangers of anti-vaccine activism—including *Slate* pieces arguing that [thimerosal is safe](#), [criticizing Oprah for promoting the dingbat Jenny McCarthy](#), and [decrying dangerous autism "treatments"](#) purported to reverse "vaccine damage" that never really happened. He wrote a [book](#), *Vaccine: The Controversial Story of Medicine's Greatest Lifesaver*, that examined the fears and misconceptions surrounding vaccination.

To admit that you got something wrong—whether for almost two decades, like Lynas did, or in a single but influential article, like Allen did—is terrifying. It is also the mark of intellectual rigor.

Lynas concludes that people who want to stick with organic are entitled to—but they should not stand in the way of others who would use science to find more efficient ways to feed billions. "[T]he GM debate is over. It is finished. We no longer need to discuss whether or not it is safe. ... You are more likely to get hit by an asteroid than to get hurt by GM food," he says.

Now the question is, will his former anti-GMO fellows heed his urge to review the science—or will they call him a turncoat shill for Monsanto?

Want more of your favorite content on the MSN homepage?  
Try the [news](#), [sports](#) or [entertainment editons](#).

248 COMMENT

f SOCIAL READING OFF

746 Tweet

my Slate

RSS PRINT EMAIL

« OLDER

[Teens Hate Twitter, World Leaders Love It](#)

NEWER »

[The Government Just Decided Google Isn't an Illegal Monopoly. Here's Why.](#)



Needs To End

79 people recommended this.



Leading Environmental Activist's Blunt

[VIEW MY NETWORK ON SLATE >>](#)

## MOST POPULAR ON SLATE

MOST READ

MOST SHARED



**1. Why Are Overweight People Less Likely To Die? A Dozen Creative Explanations.**

By William Saletan | January 2, 2013



**2. You Have a New Right To Complain About Your Job on Facebook**

By Josh Eidelson | January 3, 2013



**3. Anonymous Gets Involved in the Steubenville Rape Case. Things Get Even More Complicated.**

By Amanda Marcotte | January 3, 2013



**4. Farhad Manjoo's Five Tech Resolutions for 2013**

By Farhad Manjoo | January 4, 2013



**5. Here Are Some Tips on How to Avoid "Consensual" Police Encounters**

By Justin Peters | January 3, 2013

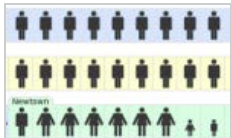
## RECOMMENDED BLOGS

- [Ars Technica](#)
- [Atlantic Technology Coverage](#)
- [Boing Boing](#)
- [Cross-Check](#)
- [Danger Room](#)
- [Edge.org](#)
- [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#)
- [Engadget](#)
- [Ethical Technology](#)
- [Futurisms](#)
- [Guardian Notes & Theories](#)
- [Gizmodo](#)
- [IO9](#)
- [Kurzweil AI](#)
- [The Loom](#)
- [Mind Hacks](#)
- [Nature News Blog](#)
- [Not Exactly Rocket Science](#)
- [President's Bioethics Commission Blog](#)
- [Robot Overlords](#)
- [Science Insider](#)
- [Science Not Fiction](#)
- [Science Progress](#)
- [Science Punk](#)
- [SmartPlanet](#)
- [Technology Review](#)
- [Technosociology](#)
- [Threat Level](#)
- [Wired Science](#)

## SLATE'S MOST VIRAL



**Leading Environmental Activist's Blunt Confession: I Was Completely Wrong To Oppose GMOs**



**How Many People Have Been Killed by Guns Since Newtown?**



**Teens Hate Twitter, World Leaders Love It**

### MORE FROM SLATE

- [What 186 MPH of Wind in the Face Looks Like](#)
- [NRA President: "I Think it Went Pretty Well"](#)
- [Picturing the Dark Side of Twins](#)
- [What a Zombie Movie Made by Particle Physicists Tells Us About Science Education](#)
- [The Government Just Decided Google Isn't an Illegal Monopoly. Here's Why.](#)

### FROM AROUND THE WEB

- [The Culture at Goldman Sachs](#) (from *Bloomberg.com*)
- [Star Trek Movies: The Best and Worst Moments](#) (from *ETonline*)
- [Internet threats beyond viruses: the top 5 digital dangers threatening your computer.](#) (from *DeVry University*)
- [Why I Dumped the iPad 3 for a Mini](#) (from *BusinessWeek*)
- [6 times it pays to wait till the last minute](#) (from *Bankrate.com*)

[?]

### Staples® - Official Store

Shop for Office Supplies, Furniture Electronics & More. That was Easy!  
[www.Staples.com](http://www.Staples.com)

### Repair Internet Explorer

Fix Internet Explorer in 2 Minutes. Download Repair Tool.  
[Support.ScanErrors.com](http://Support.ScanErrors.com)

### 54-Year-Old Mom Looks 27

Follow this 1 weird tip and remove 20 years of wrinkles in 20 days.  
[theSmartConsumerLiving.com](http://theSmartConsumerLiving.com)

### Overtime Attorney

Wage Recovery Specialist (800) 796-0849. Talk to an Attorney Now!  
[www.FloridaWageLaw.com](http://www.FloridaWageLaw.com)

### SPONSORED LINKS

### LOG IN/REGISTER



Length: 0 characters (Max: 5000)

Post

[Click here to load comments.](#)

## ALSO IN SLATE



**Will the New Republicans Make the House More Acrimonious—or Save It?**



**If Your Doctor Says Your Kid Has an Ear Infection, Don't Believe Him**



**Some Tips for Avoiding "Consensual" Police Encounters**



**Are You Smarter Than Slate's Science Editor? Take Our News Quiz and Find Out.**



**Will the New Republicans Make the House More Acrimonious—or Save It?**



**If Your Doctor Says Your Kid Has an Ear Infection, Don't Believe Him**



**Some Tips for Avoiding "Consensual" Police Encounters**



**Are You Smarter Than Slate's Science Editor? Take Our News Quiz and Find Out.**



**Why Do We Pay Such Big Taxes on Rum?**



**The Troubling Vigilante Activism in a Small-Town Ohio Rape Case**

