In Britain, the argument over GM crops has become the most contested scientific **dispute** since the arrival of the atom bomb. A 2012 public opinion poll showed recently that 72% of British people did not want genetically-modified crops to be grown in Britain - though only 58% were **opposed** to genetic modification in principle. And in spite of historic parallels that tend to suggest that **resistance** to change is rarely effective in the long run, the controversy over genetically modified crops is perhaps more critical than most.

In spite of public **apprehension**, UK governments have continued to support research into GM crops, and today hundreds of hectares of genetically engineered plants are growing in Britain, mostly in agricultural research centres, universities and plant laboratories. Here and there, fields of genetically modified crops have been planted and to the passer-by, they look no different from other fields.

In many ways, GM crops are not really very different from others. Scientists have been selecting and "improving" crops for hundreds of years, often by the slow and **dubious** method of "trial and error". Most of the crops and fruit growing in today's fields are very different from the varietiesgrown two centuries ago, and far more productive; far from being "natural" plants, they are new strains that have been developed by genetic selection of the best. "Genetic Modification" just takes the process one stage further, allowing agricultural scientists to produce new varieties with specific required qualities.

One of the main objectives in altering the genes of certain plants is to make them resistant to disease and to pests, and thus reduce the need for pesticides. Another is to make them resistant to particular weed-killers, so that farmers can spray fields knowing that the spray will kill almost all plants except the selected crop that they are growing. Other genetic modifications are aimed at producing plants that need less fertilizer or are more resistant to **drought**, and thus need less watering. Most developments in these directions are strongly positive in environmental terms.

"Genetically modified crops" are controversial. In Europe, militant "greens" and angry small-farmers have attacked and destroyed fields of experimental "GM" crops, seeing them both as symbols of multinational agribusiness, and as a threat to the world's natural environment. Different people have different views on the matter, but history shows that quantum developments in science or technology have always provoked a backlash motivated by fear or misunderstanding.

They are also positive in human terms, and development of drought-resistant and disease-resistant crops will have major implications for developing countries, where famine is a constant risk. It is therefore not surprising that developing nations with large populations to feed, such as China and India, are keen supporters of genetic research; unlike Europe and North America, with their agricultural surpluses, many poorer nations already cannot produce enough food to feed their populations.

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In other developments, laboratories are genetically **incorporating** vaccines - including hepatitis B and rabies - into certain plants. Plant-based vaccines are potentially far cheaper to produce and easier to store than their chemically-manufactured equivalents.

In the short term, the opposing arguments seem unlikely to go away. However, American farmers are already mass producing genetically modified crops, and so far there has been no reported disaster. That does not mean that disasters are impossible. In ten or twenty years' time, we may have a better idea of how likely, or unlikely they are; in the long run the argument about genetic modification will sort itself out one way or another. Until then, it is up to each individual to weigh up the pros and the cons and decide if the risks **outweigh** the advantages or not.

Adopted from: linguapress.com

Discuss these questions in pairs and answer them carefully.

1. What would be the title that best describes the entire text?
2. State the arguments that the writer makes in the text.
3. Summarize the content of the text in a short paragraph.
4. Do you agree with the writer's point of view? Why?

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