

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 6, 2016

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

Over the past several years the conversation surrounding Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) and their use in agriculture in the United States has been contentious, primarily focusing on the long-term impacts to human health from consuming GMO foods. However, an October New York Times (NYT) article addressed another issue that we believe the Government Accountability Office (GAO) should take seriously: whether the use of genetically modified crops in the United States have increased overall crop yields and decreased the use of chemical pesticides and herbicides.

According to an article published in The New York Times on October 29, 2016, a NYT study found that despite claims that the use of genetically modified crops would increase production and decrease pesticide use, this has not happened. According to the article,

“An analysis by The Times using United Nations data showed that the United States and Canada have gained no discernible advantage in yields – food per acre – when measured against Western Europe.... Also, a recent National Academy of Sciences report found that ‘there was little evidence’ that the introduction of genetically modified crops in the United States had led to yield gains beyond those seen in conventional crops. At the same time, herbicide use has increased in the United States.”

The goal to feed more of the world’s hungry is a necessary and laudable goal. One that we have actively supported for our entire careers. But if that goal is not actually being met, and if we are putting ourselves and the environment at greater risk by using GMOs, then we should take a closer look at the appropriate use of GMO technology.

Concerns from opponents of the use of genetically modified crops in the United States have centered on whether the foods produced are safe to eat and whether the production of GMO foods is harmful to the environment. While science is unsettled on those concerns, we know there are very serious harms associated with exposure to toxic, by design, pesticides and herbicides, linking them to developmental delays and cancer.

We are concerned about the findings of the NYT analysis, and ask that the GAO conduct its own study into the use of genetically modified crops in the United States, specifically whether the use of genetically modified crops has increased overall crop yields and whether the use of genetically modified crops has impacted the overall use of chemical pesticides and herbicides. When conducting the study, we ask that in addition to other resources, the GAO consider state pesticide

use reporting document, data from the United States Department of Agriculture, Environmental Protection Agency pesticide data, data from the United Nations, and information from Feed the Future, the U.S. Government's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative.

Thank you for looking into this important matter and I appreciate your timely response.

Sincerely,



Senator Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator