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Fighting for the Future of Food: Activists versus Agribusiness in the Struggle over Biotechnology (Social Movements, Protest and Contention)

Rachel Schurman, William A. Munro

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When scientists working in the agricultural biotechnology industry first altered the genetic material of one organism by introducing genes from an entirely different organism, the reaction was generally enthusiastic. To many, these genetically modified organisms (GMOs) promised to solve the challenges faced by farmers and to relieve world hunger. Yet within a decade, this "gene revolution" had abruptly stalled. Widespread protests against the potential dangers of "Frankenfoods" and the patenting of seed supplies in the developing world forced the industry to change course. As a result, in the late 1990s, some of the world's largest firms reduced their investment in the agricultural sector, narrowed their focus to a few select crops, or sold off their agricultural divisions altogether.

Fighting for the Future of Food tells the story of how a small group of social activists, working together across tables, continents, and the Internet, took on the biotech industry and achieved stunning success. Rachel Schurman and William A. Munro detail how the anti-biotech movement managed to alter public perceptions about GMOs and close markets to such products. Drawing strength from an alternative worldview that sustained its members' sense of urgency and commitment, the anti-GMO movement exploited political opportunities created by the organization and culture of the biotechnology industry itself.

Fighting for the Future of Food ultimately addresses society's understanding and trust (or mistrust) of technological innovation and the complexities of the global agricultural system that provides our food.

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