

MJ Crawley et al. Nature, 409(2001) 6821, p 682-3.

A study of the fitness of commercial crops, including GM crops, to compete in natural environments.

Crops were planted "as usual" in fields, in a range of environments. Fields were left unmanaged for four years.

Without exception, the arable crops, whether GM variants or not, died out completely during the study period.

Comment

One of the concerns with GM crops is the introduction and persistence of new genes in the environment and their subsequent transfer to unintended hosts. If GM crops were competitive with wild plants then the modified gene would remain available for transfer, indefinitely.

This study would seem to show that the fitness of arable crops in unmanaged fields is poor. The source of any genes for unintended gene transfer would therefore be self-limiting.

However, the modifications under test were not necessarily associated with fitness / competitiveness, the species and the environments chosen for test were not necessarily representative or exhaustive.

The study does demonstrate a methodology that could be more universally applied.

