

Regulatory Reform for GM/Biofortified Crops

Description of intervention

This intervention is to encourage developed country governments to relax regulations around genetically modified/biofortified crops so that developing countries can grow and sell them on global markets.

Key questions and considerations

Genetically modified or biofortification?

After more research, I'm more in favor of conventional breeding than genetic modification. Regulatory reform around genetically modified crops seems too intractable.

However, there are no significant barriers around biofortified crops in developed countries – there is no requirement for food labeling, and they are considered safe, and can be sold in the UK, EU, and US [1].

Non-regulatory policy options

An alternative policy option would be to run information campaigns in developed countries about the benefits of biofortified crops in order to create demand. Developing country farmers will then have a larger market to sell biofortified crops to, and will consume more of them themselves [1].

It's probably more tractable to run an information campaign in a developed country, but the causal chain to benefits for people in developing countries is longer than the causal chain for directly running campaigns in developing countries.

On the other hand, people in the UK are low on some micronutrients, such as vitamin D, and it may be relatively easy to create demand for biofortified staple products. There's definitely a demand for e.g. 'superfoods'. One organization found that consumers are open to manufacturers using higher-nutrient plants and grains, but that this shouldn't

compromise price or taste. Some were willing to pay more for nutrient-enhanced foods. They also found people in the UK often assume they are getting enough nutrients in their existing diets [1].

Provisional conclusion

Trying to create demand for biofortified crops in developed countries is an interesting intervention, but I think the causal chain here is quite long, making it quite hard to succeed. For example, even if we convince people that they should care more about their nutrition, private health companies will probably be able to more effectively step in and market their health products (and lobby against biofortified crops) than we would. So I think it might be better to focus on information campaigns in developing countries and leave this intervention to an organization like HarvestPlus who is already working on it [2].

Informed consideration score: **4/10**

References

1. Lockyer S, White A, Walton J, Buttriss JL. Proceedings of the “Working together to consider the role of biofortification in the global food chain” workshop. *Nutr Bull.* 2018;43:416–27.
2. HarvestPlus | HarvestPlus [Internet]. [cited 2020 Feb 13]. Available from: <https://www.harvestplus.org/>