

GM plant dilemmas

New potatoes

In the 1800s many of the poorest people in Britain and Ireland relied on potatoes as their staple food. When a fungal disease infected the potatoes, the crops failed and more than a million people starved to death. This is sometimes known as the Irish potato famine because people in Ireland were the most badly affected.

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This same fungal disease (*Phytophthora infestans*) still affects potatoes today and farmers have to spray their crops on average 15 times a year to protect them against the fungus.

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Over the years the fungus has become resistant to many of the treatments which farmers use to try to control it. Today, the disease is combated using fungicides and heavy metal treatments.

A new GM potato which is resistant to the disease has been developed by scientists.

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GENETIC
dilemmas



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This new GM potato is being trialled by farmers in Ireland. The field trials are starting now - planting more than 2,000 transplants in a fenced field.

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Some people want to stop this development as they say it is spoiling Ireland's reputation for local, organic food.

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