



*A Lenten Journey*

*Who are we,  
and what are  
we called to be?*

## Pass the (genetically engineered) stuffing!

**By Mary Minette  
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*You crown the year with your bounty;  
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.  
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,  
the hills gird themselves with joy,  
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,  
the valleys deck themselves with grain,  
they shout and sing together with joy.  
- Psalm 65: 11-13*

Did you know that [68 percent of all corn and 91 percent of all soybeans planted in the United States in 2009 were varieties that have been genetically modified to survive the application of certain commercial herbicides](#) (mostly Monsanto's Roundup) so that farmers can more easily control weeds?

And that [63 percent of corn planted in the U.S. in 2009 contained a gene from the bacteria \*Bacillus thuringiensis\*, or Bt](#), that produces a protein toxic to certain types of insects, so farmers can use fewer pesticides?

Given those numbers, it is likely that the cornbread that you use to make stuffing this Thanksgiving or the grain that your turkey ate on its way to your table contain genetically engineered (GE) crops.

What does this mean for you, and for the food supply of our country and the rest of the world?

The companies that have developed these seeds [argue](#) that they allow farmers to greatly increase their yield per acre and will be needed as the earth's population grows larger. Farmers say that they are able to apply fewer chemicals to their fields, helping the environment and saving them money, time and fuel. Proponents argue that in the future GE crops will help to manage agricultural risk from drought, pests and disease to make the world's food supply more secure, and that genetic modification holds

the promise of developing more nutritious crops. And because farmers do not have to till their fields to remove weeds each year the carbon in the soil stays put rather than being released into the atmosphere, helping to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

However, [not everyone is thrilled](#) by increasing acreage planted in genetically modified seed. Some worry that GE crops may not be safe for humans and animals to eat. Thus far, studies of the most common genetically modified food crops have failed to show that they pose any such health risk; however, the massive growth in their use has taken place over a relatively short time period and the long term impacts are not yet known.

Others argue that pollen from genetically modified crops can easily become commingled with pollen from conventional crops. Pollen drift has already led to [disputes](#) between organic farmers and their neighbors growing GE crops. Pollen drift from GE crops tolerant of herbicides could potentially lead to "super weeds" resistant to commonly used herbicides and "super bugs" resistant to Bt. If this occurs, farmers will have to return to using more toxic herbicides and pesticides at the expense of the environment.

Some say that the promise that genetically modified crops will [help to feed the world](#) ignores structural problems with the world's food supply. They argue that overall supply is not the problem; other factors including unequal distribution of food and international trade policies that favor wealthy countries over poor countries are the root causes of global hunger.

Still others argue that the increasing use of GE crops in agriculture is [assisting in the consolidation of our food system and the decline of small farms](#), as the influence of large agricultural corporations grows through the use of their genetically modified seed and related products.

These are all things to ponder this Thanksgiving, as we enjoy the fruits of the harvest and remember in our prayers those around the world who continue to live with chronic hunger.

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## Learn More and Speak Out

The ELCA has a social policy resolution on [genetically modified organisms](#) and is developing a [social statement on genetics](#). A draft of the social statement will be available in mid-March 2010 and the ELCA Task Force on Genetics will be asking for your input and comments in hearings around the country from March through November of next year. Keep an eye on the ELCA's website ([www.elca.org/socialstatements](http://www.elca.org/socialstatements)) for the draft social statement and opportunities to comment!

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## A Prayer for the Journey

*O Lord, maker of all things, you open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living creature. We praise you for crowning the fields with your blessings and enabling us once more to gather in the fruits of the earth. Teach us to use your gifts carefully, that our land may continue to yield its increase, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

- Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 62 (Augsburg Fortress 2006)

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