

**Complete Transcript of Interview Questions with Deborah Koons Garcia
Filmmaker, *The Future of Food*
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For Tech Museum of Innovation

<http://www.tech.org/genetics>

1. Tell us about your film and what inspired you to make it?

The Future of Food, my film is about the food system today is and what's happening around the corporatization of food, genetic engineering, patenting, buying up of seeds by corporations, loss of family farms, and the solution to that.

I became a vegetarian in 1970, so I've been kind of food-obsessed since then with healthy, organic food. When I did that, when I made that change, which is actually the same year I began making films when I was in college, I started studying about the food system and different foods, and what effect raising food has on health and eating a certain way has on health and so I just became very interest in it. I studied it through the years and I knew farmers, and I had a little garden. For all these years I thought it would be very interesting to make a film that crystallized all that, so I wouldn't have to lecture people, or bore them with my opinions. I could prove it! So a few years ago, I set about making the film, and I thought it was going to be about pesticides and ...I thought it was going to be about that, but as I started making the film, it became clear that the big issues now are genetic engineering and patenting, which are sort of tied up with the corporatization and control of the food supply. So, that's where a lot of the focus is on the film because people don't know about that.

2, Please explain why patenting life is so controversial.

Well, the whole patenting thing, which most citizens are totally unaware of –I mean, I was- is that starting with this Dr. Chakrabarti at General Electric. He was able to “patent life” because he genetically engineered a bacteria. He took it all in and the patent office said, “No, we can't patent this because it's life.” He took it all the way up to the Supreme Court and they agreed in the early 80's that they *could* patent life. That opened the door to patenting all kinds of things, including seeds and human DNA and all kinds of stuff like that and it's never been voted on. It was just something that went through the court systems.

So, here we have these corporations that are able to control the seed supply. They're able to patent something, and they can let out that one patented seed until the patent goes off and then they pull that back and they let out another patented seed. Breeders used to be able to protect their work. They used to be

able to work on creating a certain seed, and then you would sell it, and people wouldn't be able to go to Asia and duplicate that and sell it under-sell you. So they did have their work protected. But within that, farmers were able to re-plant their seeds. They were able to trade seeds with other farmers, and they were able to research seeds. There were these three areas that were kept to sort of honor the fact that these breeders didn't *invent* tomatoes. People have worked for thousands of years to create wheat and tomatoes and rice and all these kinds of things. They weren't invented in the laboratory yesterday.

3. Why is food diversity so important?

When I first started making this film, because I live in Marin county, you always hear "Diversity, diversity!" and you kind of get this idea that diversity is a politically correct idea, that it's nice to have diversity because we want all kinds of people and things and colors, and if you're a "good person" you believe in diversity but actually it's a lot more pragmatic than that. As we explain in the film and as people in this field know that the classic example is the Irish Potato Famine or else this more current example –in the 1970's there was a corn blight in the United States that killed off a lot of the corn, so they had to go back and find a corn originally from Mexico that was a highly differentiated corn which they call "landrace" that is kind of unique. They found a kind of corn that was naturally resistant to this blight and they bred it and the farmers used that and that's the way they fought this blight.

If you only have two kinds of corn growing in these millions and millions of acres and there's a blight that affects that corn, basically, unless you're able to go back and find some kind of corn that resists it, what are you going to do? It's famine.

4. Does the government test genetically engineered food?

I had kind of an alarming experience when I showed this film in San Diego. I was at a regular theater where people pay to get in and I was doing a Q & A afterwards. This guy stood up and he was in his fifties and he said "I work in Ag. Biotech here in San Diego." He said "San Diego is a big center for it. I work in Ag. Biotech. I have for many years. A lot of my friends work in Ag. Biotech. I didn't realize until I just saw your film that this stuff hasn't been tested for health." --because it hasn't been. They say "It's all been tested, it's all been tested." That's what the media says. But it's been tested so that if you spray Round-Up on it, it won't die. And it's been tested so that if a certain insect eats it, that that insect dies. It hasn't been tested for health. When you actually, really start looking at it carefully, the tests have been done by the corporations that profit from it and they summarize the results and hand them in to the government. The

government doesn't really say – when you look at the documentation on it –the government doesn't say “Wow, we've seen these tests and we approve it and it's safe for you.” It just says basically: tests have been done.

5. Why is labeling genetically engineered food so important?

If genetically engineered food was labeled, people wouldn't buy it. They know that. That's why they don't want it labeled. Most people wouldn't buy it. Some people wouldn't care, they wouldn't even read it. They'd just throw it in. But most people, if it were labeled, they wouldn't buy it. This is what they did in Europe. It's labeled – they won't buy it, so the stores don't stock it, so the corporations don't make it into food so the farmers don't grow it.

If we just labeled it...and the corporations say “Oh we don't want to label it, because if you label it then that means it's ‘bad’” Well, no it doesn't. They label all kinds of things –then it means it's good: “has calcium,” “doesn't have calcium” “has sugar” “doesn't have sugar” “has this, doesn't have that” Just let us know what we're eating and have a choice. That's just part of what it is to be American. We have the freedom to choose. We should demand that with our food.