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New Study Links Corn To Butterfly Deaths

Tuesday, August 22, 2000

[Iowa State University](#) researchers revealed evidence yesterday that pollen from gene engineered corn can be fatal to monarch butterflies, reigniting environmentalists' concern over bioengineered crops. The study was published in the journal *Oecologia*.

Iowa State researchers **John Obrycki** and **Laura Hansen** said their research shows butterfly caterpillars are seven times more likely to die after eating milkweed plants coated with *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) corn compared to conventional corn.

The study looked at the effects of two types of Bt corn developed by the [Novartis](#) company that has defended the safety of its Bt corn, charging that the study did not mimic the real world.

"Research conducted outdoors doesn't indicate what happens in a field environment," spokesperson Rich Lotstein said. "The weight of evidence of published and preliminary research that milkweed within 1 meter of Bt cornfields are highly unlikely to be dusted with toxic pollen."

Rebecca Goldberg, a scientist with the [Environmental Defense Fund](#), said the Iowa study demonstrates the need for 40-foot-wide buffer zones around Bt cornfields. Goldberg co-authored a landmark National Academy of Sciences report earlier this year that concluded that more research on biotech crops is needed to determine the potential risks for animal and human health. ([Reuters/Chicago Tribune](#), 22 Aug).

The [New York Times](#) reports that scientists say the study provides the first published evidence of the potential for genetically engineered pollen in the wild to harm monarch butterflies, thus opening the question of what impact the corn actually has on the butterfly population. ([New York Times](#), 22 Aug).

The findings come at the same time the [US Environmental Protection Agency](#) has launched a review of the safety of corn and cotton plants that have been spliced with the pest-fighting gene. The EPA said it will review the new study, along with other scientific research, as part of a comprehensive assessment on the risks to humans, animals, insects and plants. Their findings are expected to be published next month.

The Iowa State University study built on research conducted by Cornell University scientists that [revealed last year](#) that monarch larvae died when fed Bt corn pollen in large amounts in the field. ([Reuters/Chicago Tribune](#)). The Cornell findings prompted alarm in Europe, inciting environmental groups to call for controls on gene-altered crops.

Biotechnology supporters maintain that neither the Cornell research nor the Iowa State study provides realistic evidence. ([Associated Press/Nando.net](#), 21 Aug).



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