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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 engineered corn can be fatal to monarch butterflies, reigniting environmentalists' concerns about bioengineered crops. The study was published in the journal *Oecologia*.

Iowa State researchers **John Obrycki** and **Laura Hansen** said their research shows that monarch butterfly caterpillars are seven times more likely to die after eating milkweed plants from *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. The company has defended the safety of its Bt corn, charging that the study did not reflect the real world.

"Research conducted outdoors doesn't indicate what happens in a field environment," said a spokesperson for Rich Lotstein. "The weight of evidence indicates that monarch butterflies that feed on milkweed within 1 meter of Bt cornfields are highly unlikely to be dusted with Bt pollen."

Rebecca Goldberg, a scientist with the [Environmental Defense Fund](#), said the study demonstrates the need for 40-foot-wide buffer zones around Bt cornfields. Gold's 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 animals is cited in the [Reuters/Chicago Tribune](#), 22 Aug.

The [New York Times](#) reports that scientists say the study provides the first proof of the potential for genetically engineered pollen in the wild to harm monarch butterflies. The [New York Times](#) also opens 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](#) is questioning the safety of corn and cotton plants that have been spliced with the pest-fighting Bt gene. The agency said it will review the new study, along with other scientific research, as part of an 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 that [revealed last year](#) that monarch larvae died when fed Bt corn pollen in large amounts. [Reuters/Chicago Tribune](#). The Cornell findings prompted alarm in Europe, and some groups have called 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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