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# Contamination, Crop Trials, and Compatibility

[Donald Bruce](#)

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## Abstract

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This paper examines the ethical and social questions that underlie the present UK discussion whether GM crops and organic agriculture can co-exist

within a given region or are mutually exclusive. A European Commission report predicted practical difficulties in achieving sufficient separation distances to guarantee lower threshold levels proposed for GM material in organic produce. Evidence of gene flow between some crops and their wild relatives has been a key issue in the recent Government consultation to consult on whether or not to authorize commercial planting of GM crops, following the results of the current UK farm scale trials. The admixture of imported Bt transgenes into landrace varieties of Mexican maize also presents difficulties. An ethical evaluation is made of the claim that organic growers should expect protection from adventitious traces of GM constructs in their products. To what extent – on either side of the debate – can any particular group in society set up agricultural standards for itself that may effectively restrain others from an otherwise just business? The assumptions behind notions like “purity” and “contamination” are examined, together with their underlying views of nature and human intervention. The 2001 UK Agriculture and Environmental Biotechnology Commission report is relevant to these issues. While the

Government wishes to promote the UK biotechnology industry and is under pressure from US claims of trade restraint, a strong organic lobby demands purity from GM contamination. Does this adversarial framing of the issues reflect broader public opinion in the UK public consultation? In arriving at policy decisions, the role of the virtue of tolerance is considered in post-modern and Christian ethical contexts.