US Genetically Altering Crops with Insects, Scientist Fear Biological War Plan

Darpa is developing virus-carrying insects to disperse genetically modified viruses that are engineered to alter the genetics of plants. They say that the plan is for bugs like aphids, leafhoppers, and whiteflies to spread a virus to plants like corn and tomatoes, that will impart genes that change the plants to become resistant to disease and drought. The program is called “Insect Allies” and researchers have more than $45 million budgeted to pursue the idea. So far, experiments have only been conducted in sealed greenhouses and labs.

An international team of scientists and lawyers believe the technology could be used for military applications, and they also warn that the spread of virus-carrying insects could be difficult to control. Guy Reeves, a biologist, and researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Biology is quoted:

> *Easy simplifications … of the described work program could be used to generate a new class of biological weapons.”*
>
> *“The program is primarily a bad idea because obvious simplifications of the work plan with already-existing technology can generate predictable and fast-acting weapons, along with their means of delivery, capable of threatening virtually any crop species.”*
>
> *“We have viruses which can genetically modify a plant, or even a mouse. But no one’s ever proposed dispersing them into the environment. That’s the thing that makes Insect Allies unique.”*

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Concerned scientists also warn that even if the program is never used for such nefarious objectives that it could enable other countries to create similar technologies for the purpose of biological warfare under the guise of agricultural improvements.

Darpa doesn't want us to worry.

> *Darpa created Insect Allies to provide new capabilities to protect the United States, specifically the ability to respond rapidly to threats to the food supply. A wide range of threats may jeopardize food security, including intentional attack by an adversary, natural pathogens and pests, as well as by environmental phenomena such as drought and flooding." – Dr Blake Bextine, the Darpa program manager for Insect Allies.*

Recommended: *How To Heal Your Gut*

Sources:

- *US plan to genetically alter crops via insects feared to be biological war plan* – GM Watch
- *US plan to genetically alter crops via insects feared to be biological war plan* – The Guardian
- Image: *Gardening Tips: Controlling aphids* – Sweet Home Organics