

# From climate to crops, science hoax? Flip a coin

**Jim Fisher/Lewiston Tribune**

Can anyone deserve as much scorn as those on the political right who reject overwhelming scientific agreement to deny that we humans are causing a climate change that threatens our future well-being?

Sure. It's those on the political left who reject overwhelming scientific agreement to deny that genetically modified crops are as safe to eat as any other agricultural products on the market.

You could say each is the opposite side of the same coin. It's a counterfeit coin.

Yet another demonstration of that comes from celebrated University of Idaho weed scientist Donn Thill, who retired the other day from a 35-year career of helping farmers increase their productivity while protecting farmland from biological threats. Thill told the Tribune's Kathy Hedberg that science says the genetically modified organisms being targeted for everything from market labeling to outright prohibition "are safe to use."

He's hardly alone. You name the scientific organization — from the National Academy of Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science to the World Health Organization — and you find that it has issued the same judgment.

Even one partial outlier from this consensus, the Union of Concerned Scientists, concedes that many of the assertions to the contrary heard today are overblown. And the UCC has put its own reputation within the scientific community at risk for basing reservations about reliance on genetically modified organisms more on suspicion than evidence.

Despite the widespread agreement, however, calls for denying consumers access to safer or more nutritious foods or for encumbering the market with nonsensical labels identifying which foods contain genetic modifications continue. State legislators call for requiring such labels, and some countries, especially in Europe, try closing their doors to crops that pose no threat to human health or nutrition.

"Frankenfoods," hysterics call foodstuffs that are sometimes grown with less reliance on pesticides than conventional crops. You wonder how the same people would have responded to the work of Gregor Mendel, the 19th century botanist whose work with plant breeding founded the science of genetics.

Such wild charges sound much like the unfounded allegations made against the 97 percent of climate scientists who say human activity is changing the earth's climate in ways that will cause great disruptions to our way of life.

Their conclusion is nothing less than a deliberate hoax, say politicians like U.S. Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., and other self-proclaimed experts, including authors of letters to the editor of this newspaper. And even many farmers who know from experience the benefits of scientific

modifications to food genetics turn around and deny the scientific evidence that human-caused climate change will threaten their livelihoods.

Meanwhile, Donn Thill says continued research in plant genetics will help those farmers meet the challenges of a climate that is changing. He sees, in other words, both sides of another coin — a genuine one.