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## Common ground on sustainable agriculture: A Family Affair

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Given the often contentious nature of the agricultural biotechnology debate, some might find Pamela Ronald and Raoul Adamchak an unlikely couple.

She's a scientist who studies the genetic basis of resistance to disease and tolerance to stress in rice. He's an organic farmer, prohibited by organic certification rules from using GE seeds and plants in his fields.

But Ronald and Adamchak have found plenty of common ground in their efforts



*Pamela Ronald and Raoul  
Adamchak.*

*Photo by Liane Milton.*

California, Davis.

to advance sustainable agriculture.

“We're all trying to figure out how to farm more ecologically,” says Ronald, a plant pathologist and geneticist who has her own lab at the University of

“It's a time when we need all the tools possible,” adds Adamchak, who teaches organic farming and manages the UC-Davis student farm, which is Certified Organic.

Though federal regulatory standards for organic agriculture currently prohibit the cultivation of genetically engineered crops, Adamchak and Ronald believe biotechnology will continue to be a useful tool in advancing sustainable farming.

They see no reason why farmers can't employ both the best farm management practices and the best technology to produce safe, nutritious food.

“I think the polarization portrayed in the media about genetic engineering and organic farming is false,” Ronald says. “The media love to play up all kinds

of fierce food fights. But it's not the reality on the farm.”

On the farm, plant geneticists and farmers share concerns about how to manage pests, increase yield, prevent soil erosion and conserve water.

“I think there can be improvements made to organic agriculture that are science-based,” says Adamchak, who has proposed a new certification program for “Sustainable Agriculture” that would include GE crops.

Ronald and Adamchak have common interests beyond their desire to help feed a growing population while protecting the environment and addressing the implications of climate change.

“Like all farmers, Raoul is very interested in plants and likes to check out new seed varieties,” Ronald says. “We share that quite a bit. I've learned a lot about farming from him, and he has a science background and is very interested in genetics.”

They often team up to make public presentations and enjoy rafting trips with their two teen-aged children, Audrey and Cliff.

The couple also co-authored a book, *Tomorrow's Table: Organic Farming, Genetics and the Future of Food*, that makes a strong case for combining ecologically-based farming practices with tools like genetic engineering to create a new, more sustainable form of agriculture that will produce food for generations to come.

Though biotechnology and organic farming are often portrayed as polar opposites, Ronald and Adamchak are living proof that co-existence and collaboration are not only possible, but pleasurable. It all starts with a focus on shared goals.

Still, Ronald is aware that many remain wed to the false choice of either-or.

“It's important to find common ground,” Ronald says. “To me, it's pretty basic. If you're interested in trying to figure out how to advance sustainable agriculture then you need to entertain all good ideas.

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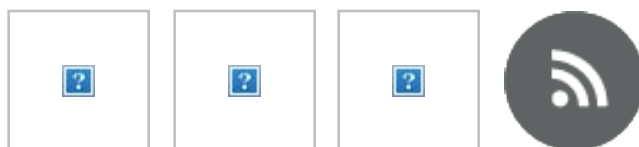
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