

[Home](#) / [Who We Are](#) / [What We Do](#) / [Initiatives](#) / [Resources](#) / [Interact](#)



Common ground on sustainable agriculture: A Family Affair

Thursday, October 1, 2015

Joan Conrow

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.

“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

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

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.

Browse other Profiles

Region: [USA, North America](#)

Topic: [Collaboration, Women in Agriculture](#)

Tags: [Tomorrow's Table](#)

Share this:



[Join the Alliance](#)

or

[Become a Member](#)

Our Partners

International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA)

Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa (OFAB)

Uganda Biosciences Information Center (UBIC) and the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO), Uganda

[All Our Partners >](#)

The Cornell Alliance for Science is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation



[Home](#) / [Contact Us](#) / [RSS Feed](#)

Cornell University.
B52 Mann Library
Ithaca, NY 14853

[Fund a Fellow](#)



The Cornell Alliance for Science is an initiative based at Cornell University, a non-profit institution. The Cornell Alliance for Science has no affiliation with any biotechnology industry organizations. In the interest of transparency, all of the funding organizations, along with the total amounts accepted, are listed below and is updated regularly: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation \$5.6 M / American Endowment Foundation \$5,000 / Ian Gazard \$5,000 / The Triad Foundation \$2,500 / John Hilliard \$2,000 / John Crary \$1,000

/ Surveillant LLC / John Friedrich Behringer \$1,000/ Professor Larry P. Walker \$1,000