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Review of *Engineering the Farm: Ethical and Social
Aspects of Agricultural Biotechnology* Edited by Britt
Bailey and Marc Lappe

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Engineering the Farm: Ethical and Social Aspects of Agricultural Biotechnology. Edited by Britt Bailey and Marc Lappé. Washington, DC: Island Press 2002. xix + 202 pp. Notes, index. \$40.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

During the last two centuries, America's Central Plains have been transformed by agriculture. But during the past thirty years, agriculture has been transformed by biotechnology, by the rise of bigger and bigger farms, and by the influence of corporate research and marketing of seeds, pesticides, and other agricultural products. This book collects a set of important essays critical of the technology that has shaped and irrevocably changed our agricultural institutions in recent decades. The authors included are almost all uniformly critical of biotechnology, corporate farming, and the internationalization of agricultural markets and trade rules. Their essays are passionate, articulate, and lucid. They are well worth the time of any thoughtful reader.

The authors include well-known scholars and writers on agriculture. Sheldon Krimsky raises searching questions about the introduction of genetically modified crops. Paul Thompson argues that we should preserve consumer opportunities to “opt out” of biotechnology by protecting the availability of non-biotech alternatives in the supermarket. Brewster Kneen and Norman Ellstrand consider the cultural and environmental effects of biotechnology and the introduction of genetically modified crops, and Lori Andrews articulates serious concerns about the rise of international patents protecting intellectual property rights in seeds and organisms. Other papers examine the safety of bioengineered foods (Britt Bailey), the likelihood that biotechnology will help to solve the problem of world hunger (Peter Rossett), the role of ethics in policy discussions (Carolyn Raffensperger), and the international resistance to biotechnology (David Barling). Marc Lappé offers a thoughtful essay that attempts to put into perspective the convictions and arguments of those who oppose biotechnology, and Francis Moore Lappé argues that a focus on biotechnology effectively distracts us from the real political and institutional causes of hunger.

No one would regard this collection as an objective and impartial presentation of the issues surrounding biotechnology and the rise of corporate agriculture: the papers included come from a skeptical and critical perspective, and most of the authors are well-known critics. But the editors clearly note that they intend these papers as a contribution to an ongoing debate, and they are explicit about their own work coming from a critical perspective. Any thoughtful reader will find important ideas to consider and many points of disagreement. But this collection should be especially valuable for anyone interested in agriculture, world hunger, biotechnology, and the important changes that have transformed the world we live in and the food we eat. **Clark Wolf**, *Bioethics Program, Iowa State University*.