Video 5: Peer to Peer Discussion

In this discussion, students try to clarify areas of confusion among themselves. They puzzle through complicated scientific ideas and ask their peers for help. They wrestle with questions ranging from the definitional -- what is organic -- to the societal -- how does policy get created. In this discussion, students mention cisgenic organisms, which are organisms that contain a mixture of genes from within the species. Transgenic organisms contain a mixture of genes that come from other species.

MALE: And the article brought up like a question -- the question like whether or not it was okay to plant -- plant these plants that could compete with natural plants via like transgenic or cisgenic techniques. Like could -- because would it be better to plant plants that are cisgenic? Would they compete as much as a plant that had transgenic genes, or would it -- they would -- since it's natural, would it be okay just to plant plants that were cisgenic?

MALE: I think they're afraid of like crossing species, because like they're like -- it's like organic versus like genetically modified. And like I don't really understand like the – like the present concept of organic foods versus genetically modified, because technically if you would

genetically modify something, like I assume like it's going to like make it better. I don't know why. Because like there really isn't like harmful chemicals being created because you're not really introducing any like particular pesticides or anything. But I think they're like afraid of like the genetically modified spreading their genes to the other -- like to the other organic plants.

MALE: And I think also they're a little bit worried about genetic diversity. I mean if all the plants are the same, and then you get this new like say climate -- say climate change introduces a new -- a new environmental factor, and none of these plants can deal with it, then you have to deal with all of the plants having to adjust, and they're not -- and because there's no genetic diversity, they won't be able to adjust as quickly.

FEMALE: But I don't know, on the fourth page, like the last page of our reading, they make the point that even if organic plants get some of the genetically modified genes, like in the process, they technically can still be called organic. So I was -- when I was reading it, I was just kind of thinking like what was -- what's the problem then if like the genetically modified plants -- like the organic plants are being planted organically, and if some genetically -- genetically modified plants, like the pollen is getting into the organic plants, but they're still able to be called

organic. Like why is there such a big issue with this?

FEMALE: I think it's only .1 percent of the seeds can be transgenic seeds.

FEMALE: Well it depends on the --

FEMALE: Oh, yeah, it depends -- there's like a couple different (ranges) for different plants. But like I think like the point is that, you can't like -- unless -- if they're not in that margin, like that really tiny margin for how -- like their percentage of the plants that are transgenics, then they can't sell that and reap high organic food prices.

FEMALE: I have a similar question. Like how -- like -- as Lydia's. How -- can -- do they like make up these -- well it doesn't say -- it says the U.S. doesn't really have one, but how do some countries decide like the -- how -- what percent is all right for it to be called organic?

FEMALE: Well some -- like it says in the second column that some organic buyers refuse to buy any foods that have any percent of the genetically modified genes. So I think that they probably have to take into consideration the money that they would possibly be losing from the buyers…