

FACTS

It's Not Easy Being Green

With genetically modified crops, agribusiness is positioning itself as nature's very best friend. Where does this leave environmentalists? By Greg Dicum

DOWN ON

tech started tinkering with crops, modified foods have found for pests (who have " Frankenfoods"). buy genetically potatoes and in Europe, peace have portation of produce. But with rations,

getting they can at their own their test-tube the environment's

BETTER

modifications, created by with a plant's material or from one into ther. But modifications gned to benefit retailers. e claims being anies like Novartis, they der to the earth own products.

AND WHAT WONDERS HAS THIS YIELDED?

A widely used application is *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), a bacterial insecticide. Scientists plug it into the genes of corn, potatoes and cotton, after which the plants produce it themselves. By altering the genetic composition of aspens, scientists have also developed wood that can be made into paper with fewer harsh chemicals. And Monsanto has developed plants that are resistant to pesticide, allowing farmers to spray it and harm only weeds — so long as they

many scientists are concerned that such widespread use of Bt will cause insects to develop an immunity. Finally, environmentalists are alarmed that a multinational company like Monsanto has the temerity to suggest it is saving the earth. That's *their* job.

SOUNDS RATHER CONFUSING?

When environmentalists condemn research that at least claims to reduce pollution and conserve energy, it can get



use the pesticide in question, which happens to be Monsanto's flagship product. "We obviously see that this is a technology that presents the opportunity to use less pesticides, to farm in a more sustainable way," says a Monsanto official.

SO WHAT HAS GOT THE GREENS SEEING RED?

For starters, they fear that any kind of genetic manipulation could disrupt the fragile ecosystem in horrible ways. So far in nature, no engineered genes have migrated from cultivated crops to wild plants, but even Vincent Chiang, a professor at Michigan Tech University who developed a genetically modified tree, allows that "it's possible." Second,



awfully hard to tell who's on what team. Last month, Gerber baby food — which is owned by Novartis, a leader in high-tech agriculture — announced that it would stop using genetically modified ingredients. And recently, Robert Shapiro, the C.E.O. of Monsanto (which brought us Agent Orange), gave an impassioned pro-ecology speech: "If the only model for development is the recapitulation of the Industrial Revolution, with all its horrific waste and pollution, there simply is no way that development can occur without doing permanent, irreversible damage to the systems on which life depends." In thanks, environmentalists threw a tofu cream pie in his face.

THE NEW ECONOMY

Unreal Estate

Internet stocks may no longer be soaring, but the market for Web addresses is getting tighter all the time. By John Cook

Earlier this month, the Internet domain name www.drugs.com — just the name, nothing else — was sold to an anonymous buyer for \$823,456 (which works out to about \$103,000 per letter). It was not the highest sum ever paid for a domain name (many addresses, including wallstreet.com and bingo.com, have fetched \$1 million or more), but it is evidence of how the supposedly limitless World Wide Web is running short on real estate.

According to Network Solutions, a company that registers domain names, all you need to secure a home on the Web is \$70 and an unclaimed name with no more than 22 characters. But that's not as easy as it sounds: although a Network Solutions representative says quality domain names are "limited only by the imagination," most experts agree that all the good names have been taken — by enterprising visionaries hoping to turn a \$70 investment into a retirement fund.

What makes a good name? For starters, dot-com is the essential suffix. Dot-net and dot-org just can't compare. Jeffrey Tinsley, the C.E.O. of Great Domains, the company that brokered the sale of drugs.com, explains: "Drugs.org or drugs.net are worth something to someone, but dot-com is the Internet's Rodeo Drive." (Of course, any speculator knows that today's slum can be tomorrow's hot neighborhood; Great Domains' parent company holds the rights to wallstreet.org.)

Domain names emerged as an object of intense speculation around 1996, the year Great Domains was founded. The people who got in the game early often just stumbled across the idea. A typical case might be Scott Day, an Oklahoma watermelon farmer who in 1997 registered watermelon.com — and in the process sensed a business opportunity. He quickly snapped up several food-related names (including cook.com, desserts.com and barbecue.com), envisioning a Web-based culinary empire. "Over 500 people a day type in 'cook.com' looking for recipes," says Day, who gave up growing watermelons.

Many entrepreneurs control large blocks of sites. Rick Schwartz, a Web developer in Boca Raton, Fla., who was introduced to the domain game as an operator of adult-entertainment sites, has more than 3,000 titles, including fishingtackle.com (which cost him just the \$70 registration fee), sneaky.com (\$3,000), men.com (\$15,000), abuseexcuse.com (\$70, after hearing the term used on CNN in reference to Hillary Clinton) and d-i-v-o-r-c-e.com (for \$70, not in honor of the Tammy Wynette classic but because it would read well on a billboard). Though he's not in the habit of selling domain names — he intends to develop businesses around all his sites — Schwartz did accept \$100,000 for the rights to [eScore.com](http://escore.com) (from Kaplan Education Services, the college-board prep company). "I bought my mother a condominium on the beach," he explains.

Other high-stakes addresses acquired in the domain name rush include art.com (sold for more than \$450,000) and rock.com (\$1 million). Addresses with an 'e' or an 'i' before them — like etoys.com — are also considered hot; those preceded by a number (4drugs.com) are getting there, too. Even mis-

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different address



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Great Grandma said "I do", once.
When she bought a sofa,
she bought it once.



It took her a little longer to buy a sofa
than it took her to choose a husband.

and was easy - she was smart and wealthy. The sofa took a little
because she's smart and still wealthy. She chose a Carlyle. The only sofa
world made with the STEELWEAVE™ mechanism. Naturally, Great
Great Grandpa, and the Carlyle sofa bed, lived happily ever
l, most of the time!

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Collection
d Ave.
Y. 10028
-2236

Sofabed Express
122 West 18th Street
New York, N.Y. 10011
212-675-3212

Classic Collection
1056 Third Ave.
New York N.Y. 10021
212-838-1525

8.22.99

spelled versions of famous addresses — like amazom.com and yahpp.com — can turn a profit, since they guarantee a certain amount of traffic based solely on typos. No niche market is too obscure to attract speculators. "I've seen someone trying to sell ostrichmeat.com for \$5,000," says Ellen Rony, co-author of the "The Domain Name Handbook."

Internet experts believe that sooner or later the naming system will have to change to accommodate the Web's growth. Until it does, however, promoters are hungry for any address that will attract traffic, even if it's from people who land there accidentally. "I know of a young boy who wanted to check on a Nintendo game called Zelda," Rony says. "So he typed in zelda.com, and guess what? It's a porn site. And he got into trouble for that from his school. How could he know? It's a messy business." ■

Site Selection

John Cook goes looking for a Web address, but finds the most obvious permutations of his own name have already been snapped up.

Domain Availability

Cook.com "It's not for sale," says its owner, Scott Day, a former watermelon farmer in Oklahoma who has plans to start a cooking Web site. Not for any sum? "I don't think it would be affordable to you. It wouldn't be affordable for any individual."

Cook.net "If it were just a cash deal, I'd have to hold out for \$25,000," says David Cook, a Florida investor who once owned the phone number 1-800-PHONECALL, which he sold for \$25,000.

Cook.org "I'd probably sell it for upward of \$10,000," says Steve Anderson, the C.F.O. of a Silicon Valley company. "I think the dot-org domain names are worth a lot less. A dot-com domain name is worth 10 times a dot-org, potentially. It's all in what the buyer's willing to pay for it."

John.com Network Solutions has the address registered to a John Little of Cupertino, Calif., but efforts to contact him were unsuccessful.

eCook.com "We're building a prototype of a very cool cooking site, targeted more toward pop-culture," says Firas Bushnaq, who heads a firm known as Ecompany and maintains that the name is not for sale. But if it were? "Anywhere from \$100,000 to \$200,000."

Cookweb.com "It was something that I tried to do, and just didn't have time with school," says Timothy Cook, a 16-year-old from West Melbourne, Fla. "I couldn't see charging more than the price it cost me, which is \$100. I'd have to talk to my dad."

Jcook.com "I registered the domain name for a friend of mine a few years ago," says Rodney Joffe of Phoenix. "He has yet to use it, but keeps making noises. He has rejected offers because he really wants it for himself, but my guess is that he'd probably settle for a couple hundred dollars."