



Conversations on Science, Society, and the Future of Gene Editing

The scientific community has handed the world an incredible tool: the ability to make precise edits to the DNA in living cells. These technologies could allow us to transform our food, health and ecological systems. They also raise important questions about risks, benefits, ethics, equity and more.

CRISPRcon: Conversations on Science, Society and the Future of Gene Editing returned for its second annual flagship event on June 4-5, 2018 in Boston at the Seaport Hotel and World Trade Center. Following on the success of the inaugural CRISPRcon at the University of California, Berkeley in 2017, this year's event featured diverse panel discussions, keynote presentations, brief scientific case studies, small group dialogue, and audience interaction to advance dialogue on whether and how gene editing technologies should make the transition from the lab into society at large.

CRISPRcon's panels tackled varied topics such as the historical and cultural contexts for gene editing and what's at stake; the value – and successes and pitfalls – of community engagement; technology democratization and who develops, decides upon, and benefits from gene editing applications; the role of thought leaders and 'culture creators' in shaping and channeling broader dialogue on gene editing; challenges and opportunities for coordination, collaboration, and governance across nations and cultures; and the ethical, social, and technological limits for gene editing technology.



"When we start valuing a lot of opinions from all parts of the world, then we can start looking at a proper solution."

Ruramiso Mashumba
Chomwedzi Farm, Zimbabwe

Day One keynote speaker Feng Zhang of the McGovern Institute for Brain Research at MIT and Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard talked with WBUR journalist Carey Goldberg about the role of the scientist as gene editing technology advances and the public gets more engaged. Day Two's keynote speaker, author and journalist Charles Mann, challenged the audience to think about the historical frameworks into which today's scientific debates fit and presented differing worldviews regarding whether and how technology can be used to overcome resource limits.

In between panel discussions, young scientists presented brief overviews of varied applications for gene editing, from personalized pig avatars for precision medicine to genome editing to make the staple crop cassava healthier and more sustainable.

Videos of each of the plenary sessions, along with more information on CRISPRcon's panel topics and speakers, are available at www.crisprcon.org.

CRISPRcon's 400 attendees from academia, civil society, government, industry, the media, and the general public brought backgrounds and interests in the role of gene editing in food and agriculture, medicine and health, conservation and the environment, and beyond. Electronic polling and participant-led roundtable discussions after lunch on Day One allowed CRISPRcon attendees to drive discussion and share their perspectives. In the final polling questions as CRISPRcon was ending, participants flagged as some of their main takeaways the importance of storytelling, listening, outreach, community engagement, and seeking input from diverse points of view. As one attendee put it, "the social issues are stronger than the tech issues."

Throughout the one-and-a-half days of CRISPRcon 2018, speakers and attendees grappled with important societal questions about gene editing, including considerations of risks, benefits, ethics, access, equity, and governance. The event modeled the diversity – of gender, race, perspective, geography, discipline, and age – that will be essential as conversations about gene editing continue. While CRISPRcon does not advocate for a specific future for CRISPR and other gene editing applications, it does advocate for continued dialogue on these challenging issues.



Hosted by the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard & the McGovern Institute for Brain Research at MIT.



CRISPRcon was developed by the Keystone Policy Center in partnership with the Personal Genetics Education Project of the Department of Genetics at Harvard Medical School and the CRISPRcon Steering committee.



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

