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For years, GM proponents have been claiming breakthroughs in developing crops that tolerate saline soils. But as of 2011, none have been commercialised. An [article](#) from 2009 said only that GM scientists "are close to developing crops that are tolerant of salt".

The difficulty is that the genes that salt tolerance in plants is regulated not by one or two genes but by a complex network of genetic functioning that cannot be replicated by the crude methods of the genetic engineer.

GM salt tolerant crops, if they existed, would be a band-aid solution to a problem that intensive and chemical agriculture has caused. The sensible answer to salination of soils is prevention by sustainable farming and water management techniques. If it's too late for prevention, then the soil must be rebuilt by incorporating plenty of organic matter into it and planting different crops in stages according to its recovery.

As any coastal grower knows, there is no shortage of naturally salt tolerant plants and crops. In India, Dr Vandana Shiva's biodiversity organisation Navdanya has collected indigenous varieties of salt tolerant crop seeds for years. Following the 2004 tsunami, scientists said that local farming would have to be put on hold for five years because too much salt had been washed into the soil. But Navdanya dug into its seed bank and [distributed salt-tolerant crop seed to farmers](#), enabling them

to keep producing.

While GM struggles to get out of the starting blocks in producing salt-tolerant crops, conventional breeding forges ahead. Here are some examples.

[Wild parent spawns super salt-tolerant rice](#) (April 2013)

[New salt-tolerant rice strain could help in fight for food security](#) (April 2013)

[Salt-tolerant wheat developed in Australia](#) (April 2010)

CSIRO researchers have developed a salt tolerant durum wheat that yields 25 per cent more grain than the parent variety in saline soils.

[New salt-tolerant wheat set to bring life to "dead" farmland](#) (July 2004)

Scientists have developed a non-GM salt-tolerant wheat which could allow farmers to crop a third of the 1.8 million hectares of agricultural land lost to salinity across Australia's wheat belt.