

Acquiescing to Big Biotech: Relentless Drive to Force GMO Crops into Britain

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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A report just published by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee on food security in Britain supports Environment Secretary Owen Paterson's plan to push ahead with growing genetically modified (GM) crops in England. However, it doesn't mention which crops would actually be grown [1].

The Committee says that the Government should do more to inform the public about "potentially beneficial impacts" of GM crops under development, but, according to Genewatch UK, the report fails to inform the public that the commercial GM crops that would actually be grown commercially are tolerant to companies' own-brand weedkillers, such as Monsanto's RoundUp Ready crops.

The "potentially beneficial impacts" of GM crops just don't stack up. For instance, non-GM farming in Europe has outperformed GM farming in the USA [2] and poisonous pesticides, destructive fertilisers and patented GE seeds can't even match 1890 or even 1760 AD yields in India [3].

Director of GeneWatch UK, Dr Helen Wallace, says:

"RoundUp Ready GM crops are the crops which could be grown in England perhaps as early as next year. Blanket spraying of these crops with weedkiller would lead to massive loss of habitat for birds and butterflies and a plague of superweeds for farmers. The costs of segregating GM and non-GM would push up food prices for everyone, and non-GM farmers would lose out financially if their conventional or organic crops become contaminated".

Monsanto's or Syngenta's RoundUp Ready GM maize (NK603 and GA21), which are blanket sprayed with the weedkiller glyphosate (brand name RoundUp), are in the commercial pipeline for EU cultivation approvals. Again, some of the "potentially beneficial impacts" of RoundUp Ready GM crops include the growth of herbicide-tolerant superweeds and the loss of habitat for birds and butterflies: leading, for example, to a crash in the population of the Monarch butterfly in the United States [4,5]. Aside from the environmental dangers, there are very strong links between glyphosate and a very wide range of serious human ailments and diseases [6].

In the UK, there are no national measures for co-existence of GM and non-GM crops and for liability for the costs of contamination incidents, which can cost conventional and organic farmers many millions of pounds in lost markets for their products [7]. Contamination seems of little concern to the global biotech sector, though. It has already recklessly contaminated

the environment with its poison [8] and, as far as GMOs are concerned, it is more a case of the more contamination, the better [9].

The EU 'opt out' proposal adopted by EU ministers in June, which will now go to the European Parliament, could speed up GM crop approvals in England by loosening Europe-wide regulations that are currently in place. Countries opposed to growing would opt out by imposing regional bans on the cultivation of specific crops. Scotland and Wales will opt out from growing GM crops, but the Government wants England to press ahead. This 'opt out' proposal is regarded as constituting little more than part of a 'Monsanto-friendly' [10] strategy, which is being facilitated by Minister Owen Paterson, who has worked closely with the GMO industry on UK policy, including on a PR strategy which seeks to avoid discussion of RoundUp Ready crops and the multinational companies that sell them [11]. Paterson appears little more than a misinformed puppet of the GMO sector [12] and seems content to be a part of that sector's multi-pronged political subterfuge to force GMO onto the British public [13]. Such a pity that Paterson and others are content to climb into bed with a company that has such a long history of duplicity and criminality [14].

One positive aspect of the Committee's report is the recommendation that Government reduces dependence on imported soybean for animal feed, warning that increased demand for protein from emerging economies threatens current supply lines. Much of this imported soya is GM. The Committee also recommends that the UK takes steps to become more self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables, supermarkets shorten their supply chains to support more local food; and better long-term weather prediction for farmers is developed.

In response to this, Helen Wallace states:

"It is a pity that these valuable recommendations on food security are likely to be drowned out by this Committee's misleading claims on GM crops. Reducing dependency on imported GM soya, used to feed animals in Britain, would be a big step forward in making our food supply more sustainable and secure."

'Food security' and 'sustainability' are nice sounding terms. However, acquiescing to big US biotech concerns does not guarantee either. It's not meant to. Quite the opposite in fact [15,16].

Notes

[1] House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. Food security. Second Report of Session 2014-15.

[2] Heinemann et al. (2013) Sustainability and innovation in staple crop production in the US Midwest. International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability. Published online: 14 Jun 2013. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14735903.2013.806408#.Ub9AU5zXryU>

[3] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/india-genetically-modified-seeds-agricultural-productivity-and-political-fraud/5328227>

[4] For superweeds see: Benbrook CM (2012) Impacts of genetically engineered crops on pesticide use in the U.S. - the first sixteen years. Environmental Sciences Europe

24(1):24.<http://www.enveurope.com/content/24/1/24> ; BBC report 19th September 2012:<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-19585341> ; GM crops: Farmer to Farmer:<http://gmcropsfarmertofarmer.com/> ; Greenpeace "Growing Doubt" video, October 2012:<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/campaigns/agriculture/problem/genetic-engineering/Growing-Doubt/> ; more videos of superweeds on: <http://www.gmfreeze.org/why-freeze/videos-and-clips/>.

[5] For Monarch butterflies

see: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/apr/18/tracking-causes-monarch-butterfly-decline> ; Pleasants JM, Oberhauser KS (2013) Milkweed loss in agricultural fields because of herbicide use: effect on the monarch butterfly population. Insect Conservation and Diversity 6(2):135-144. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1752-4598.2012.00196.x/abstract>

[6]

<http://www.gmo-evidence.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Glyphosate-Destructor-of-Human-Health-and-Biodiversity.pdf>

[7] GM Contamination Register: <http://www.gmcontaminationregister.org/>

[8]

<http://www.greenmedinfo.com/blog/roundup-weedkiller-found-75-air-and-rain-samples-gov-study-finds>

[9]

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/contamination-and-bio-pollution-the-criminality-of-the-gm-biotech-industry/5371517>

[10]

<http://corporateeurope.org/food-and-agriculture/2014/05/biotech-lobbys-fingerprints-over-new-eu-proposal-allow-national-gmo>

[11] GeneWatch UK PR: UK Government and GM industry collusion exposed. Tuesday 6th May 2014. [http://www.genewatch.org/article.shtml?als\[cid\]=492860&als\[itemid\]=574495](http://www.genewatch.org/article.shtml?als[cid]=492860&als[itemid]=574495)

[12]

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tory-mp-says-progm-environment-secretary-owen-paterson-is-industry-puppet-8686133.html>

[13]

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/monsanto-syngenta-and-bayer-cropscience-the-gmo-biotech-sector-cant-win-the-scientific-debate-the-options-are-co-option-deception-and-collusion/5381725>

[14] <http://www.wakingtimes.com/2014/06/20/complete-history-monsanto-worlds-evil-corporation/>

[15]

<http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4929-hungry-for-land-small-farmers-feed-the-world-with-less-than-a-quarter-of-all-farmland>

[16]http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=389x3365735

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About the author:

Colin Todhunter is an extensively published independent writer and former social policy researcher. Originally from the UK, he has spent many years in India. His website is www.colintodhunter.com
https://twitter.com/colin_todhunter

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