

# Genetic Engineering, Biotechnology and the Future Of Humanity

## Lies, Propaganda And Puppets

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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Last year, the then British Agriculture Minister Jim Paice told the Cereals 2012 conference that the public is softening its views towards GM crops (1). He said more work needed to be done to communicate the 'full facts' about GM crops. He stated:

"GM is not the panacea and it isn't going to produce all the food on its own, but it has a role to play as long as it is applied safely and all the tests on its application are properly carried out... But yes... I do believe that the famous tanker is beginning to turn."

Reality check for Jim Paice: the public is not 'softening' its views, no matter how hard the GM sector tries to soften us up. Moreover, just whose version of the 'full facts' are we to be subjected to? Those of the GM sector?

As if Paice's words were not worrying enough, even more alarming were the comments last year from the British Environment Secretary, Owen Paterson. He called concerns over the use of GM foods "complete nonsense" in an attack on public concerns about GMOs (2):

"Emphatically we should be looking at GM ... I'm very clear it would be a good thing... The trouble is all this stuff about Frankenstein foods and putting poisons in foods. There are real benefits, and what you've got to do is sell the real environmental benefits. Those benefits include a reduction in the use of pesticides because some GM crops are pest-resistant."

Paterson also said that consumers were already unwittingly eating GM food on a regular basis, so concerns about human health are misplaced:

"There's about 160 million hectares of GM being grown around the world. There isn't a single piece of meat being served [in a typical London restaurant] where a bullock hasn't eaten some GM feed. So it's a complete nonsense. But, the humbug! You know, large amounts of GM products are used across Europe."

So there you have it, straight from the horse's mouth, or more aptly, from a minister acting as a front for the pro-GM lobby - GM foods are safe simply because people do not know they are eating it, have no say in eating it and have not dropped dead from eating it. Perhaps Patterson would like to consult the mounting research that contradicts his assertions pertaining to the health impacts.

Such playground logic may wash well in certain quarters, but should we expect such inanity from a senior politician? You do not have to necessarily be a dyed in the wool sceptic to conclude that Paterson's knowledge of the issues is limited at best and that his words have all the subtlety of a glossy pro-GM brochure.

In a June 2013 speech, Paterson was still peddling the same line and stated that "seven million children" had gone blind or died over the past 15 years because "every attempt" to introduce a GM rice fortified with sight-saving vitamin A had "been thwarted." Very emotive and simplistic stuff, which conveniently overlooks wider more complex issues related to food poverty.

Surprisingly, however, one of the most damning indictments of Paterson's recent speech came not from expected anti-GM sources, but from millionaire MP Zac Goldsmith, who is a member of the Conservative Party to which Paterson also belongs. Goldsmith accused his fellow party member of making "nonsensical" claims about the benefits of GM technology, claiming that Paterson is a puppet of the industry and does not understand the dangers genetically modified crops pose to the ecosystem.

Speaking to The Independent newspaper on 3 July, Mr Goldsmith said:

"Any half-way decent GM enthusiast with a scientific background would have blushed during much of the speech Owen Paterson made. You have to wonder about the government's gung-ho attitude to GM... It undermines his credibility on this issue and makes the government look very silly... I think he's falling into a trap over GM and I don't think he understands the issue. He's swallowed the industry line hook, line and sinker without talking to anyone with a different view. When designing policy that's a dangerous thing, and I'm concerned big business is framing the debate for the government... The story so far suggests that GM is predominantly about the industry getting greater control over the food chain, rather than alleviating poverty or environmental concerns." (3)

Is Paterson unaware of the issues related to the hijack of food and agriculture by powerful agribusiness, the lax regulations concerning its activities and the seed patenting and monopolies and resultant difficulties faced by farmers in places like India (4,5)?

Is he also unaware of the documented health risks or the actual efficacy or lack of agricultural benefits derived from GMOs (6,7,8,9,10)?

Or is he content to become part of the problem by kowtowing to the massive well-documented GMO industry pressures and its global PR machine, which receives full and active support from the US State Department (11,12)?

Based on the overwhelming evidence, it is Paterson who is talking complete nonsense. In response to Patterson, Peter Melchett, policy director at the Soil Association, said:

"GM crops are not cheaper, they use more pesticides in America not less, and they haven't increased yields - so Mr Paterson has got most of his facts wrong. He talks about embracing new technology, but there are better ways of breeding crops now that do produce bigger yields, are resistant to drought and salinity. They are helping produce high yields in Africa right now. The minister's obsession with GM really is backward-looking." (13)

Melchett also says:

“Owen Patterson is wrong to claim that GM crops are good for the environment. The UK Government’s own farm scale experiment showed that overall the GM crops were worse for British wildlife. US Government figures show that overall pesticide use has increased since GM crops have been grown there because, as scientists opposed to GM predicted, superweeds and resistant insects have multiplied. The recent British Science Association survey showed public concern has not changed, and the number of people saying that GM food should be encouraged dropped from 46 per cent in 2002 to 27 per cent in 2012. Owen Patterson says that people are eating meat from animals fed of GM feed without realising it. That is because the British Government has consistently opposed moves to label to give consumers accurate information, and he should put that right by immediately introducing compulsory labelling of meat and milk from animals fed on GM feed.” (2)

Friends of the Earth’s senior food and farming campaigner Clare Oxborrow has said:

“Owen Paterson’s claims that we need GM crops simply don’t stack up. The industrial farming system, which GM aggravates, has been instrumental in causing the global food crisis we currently face. A fresh approach to agriculture is urgently needed to serve up sustainable diets globally, including reduced meat-consumption in wealthy nations and an end to food crops being used for biofuels.” (14)

Eight European countries have banned the production of GM crops: Poland, Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Greece, and Bulgaria. In nearly 50 countries around the world, including Australia, Japan, and most of the countries in Europe have either banned GM crop production outright, or have put in place extremely tight restrictions on the production and use of GM products.

Even though GM crops are prevalent in the US, there was significant concern from scientists at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prior to the FDA allowing GM products into the food chain. The concerns of the scientists were ignored, and by the time the public became aware, the GM products were firmly embedded into the US food production chain (15).

FDA scientists had continually warned regulators that GM crops could create unpredictable and hard to detect side effects, including allergies, toxin production, nutritional problems, and new diseases. They recommended that long-term studies were needed to fully assess the effect of GM foods on other crops, the ecosystem, and animal and human health, but these warnings were ignored.

In India, continued use of GM modified cotton has reduced yields, and the cotton bollworm has developed a resistance to the GM crops which contain the Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) toxin (16).

The claims that the use of GM crops reduce the use of pesticides do not hold up in either. Research by a Washington State University team found that the use of herbicides and insecticides has increased dramatically since GM crops were introduced in the US in 1996 (17).

Researchers at the University of Arizona found that multi-toxin GM crops (which are the

most technologically advanced crops in use) quickly lose their ability to fend off pests, which is likely to lead to a complete failure of the GMO (18).

Moreover, there has been no proper research or monitoring by the companies producing GM crops of the effects on humans consuming products made with GM crops. Scientists like Professor Seralini in France who have published studies critical of GM crops and food have suffered a wave of designed to undermine their work by supporters of the technology.

Minister Patterson's pro-GM attitudes come as little surprise, though. The cosy relationship between governments and the biotech companies is well known, especially in the US (19), where there has been legislation passed that allows biotech companies to be totally free of any legal ramifications if their products cause harm (20).

In the UK, Genewatch UK has revealed how Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer, and BASF (all biotech companies) under the guise of the 'Agricultural Biotechnology Council' held a meeting in June 2012 with government ministers and academics to formulate a 'strategy' to promote GMO in schools, to 'educate' the public, to 'improve' the regulatory framework favouring GMOs, and encouraging farmers to change their farming methods to fully accommodate the GMO products the companies produce.

Dr Helen Wallace, Director of GeneWatch UK said:

"This dodgy deal shows breath-taking arrogance by Monsanto and its friends, who seem to think that British farming must be destroyed to suit their own commercial interest and British children should be brainwashed to support their business strategies. It is shocking that the Government has done a secret deal to promote GM in Britain and abroad when US farmers are struggling to tackle superweeds and superpests caused by growing GM crops. Ministers should not prop up this failing industry by pushing Monsanto's propaganda in British schools at taxpayers' expense." (21)

Despite recent euphoric claims by some quarters that Monsanto has been placed on the back foot, this is far from the truth. The biotech sector continues to try to hijack legislation for its own gain, as evidenced by the 2013 Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India bill 2013 (22), and is determined to continue to push its global agenda (23).

Maybe politicians such as Owen Paterson are content to be willing servants for the wider military-industrial complex agenda that GMOs (and big dam, oil-dependent chemical agriculture) are tied to. And that agenda encompasses an integrated strategy that involves the (near) monopoly ownership and control of all water, seeds, food and food retail, land and energy, which in turn both fuels and is fuelled by conflict, debt and dependency (24,25,26,27). From Syria and Pakistan, to Egypt, India and Europe, we see this agenda being played out via conflict or war, trade agreements (28,29) and the molding of political agendas (30).

For the big corporations and the families and individuals behind them, profit and 'full spectrum global dominance' of resources, nations and people is the ultimate aim.

## Notes

1)

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