

Genetically Modified Food and the False GMO Narrative: Britain's "Corporate Political Parrots"

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British Environment Secretary Elizabeth Truss has stated that genetically modified (GM) food should be grown in Britain because it is more 'eco-friendly'. She adds that steps should be taken to speed up this development. Her statements come as little surprise to many because Truss's predecessor, Owen Paterson, was also a staunch supporter of GM technology.

He was so staunch in his support that fellow Conservative Party MP Zak Goldsmith stated Paterson was little more than an industry puppet ([see here](#)). Paterson was ignorant of or quite content to ignore the devastating, deleterious health, environmental, social and economic impacts of GMOs (see [here](#)). He acted as a mouthpieces for the GMO biotech sector and made numerous false claims about the benefits and safety of GMOs that flew in the face of research findings.

During his ministerial stint, Owen Paterson was keen to reassure the British public that safety concerns over GMOs are based on "humbug" and that GM food is completely safe to eat. His comments appeared to come from the school of bogus logic that is based on the premise that 'no one has ever died from eating GM food.'

Paterson, Truss and other supporters of GMOs (and indeed the pesticide-ridden food that we are fed) might like to consider the long-term negative health impacts that petrochemical agriculture is having on humans before claiming that GMOs are safe or indeed are safer than 'conventional' food (as Paterson once stated). Writing in India's Deccan Herald newspaper, food policy analyst Devinder Sharma cites evidence indicating the wholly fallacious nature of such a claim, especially as illnesses and diseases relating to pesticide use can take more than a generation to show up (see [here](#)).

Paterson's support for GMOs was being carried out in partnership with a number of pro-GMO institutions, including the Agricultural Biotechnology Council (ABC), which is backed by GM companies such as Monsanto, Syngenta and Bayer CropScience. Last year, despite government attempts to throw a veil of secrecy over meetings and conversations it had with the industry, GeneWatch UK uncovered evidence that GMO companies are driving UK government policy in this area (see [here](#)).

The evidence strongly suggests that the Government and the GMO industry is manipulating the media and forcing GM crops into Britain. Details of certain emails were made public and revealed what the veil of secrecy is trying to hide and what many strongly suspected: collusion between the government and the GMO sector is rife.

Truss was appointed to her current role six months ago. It is the first time she has spoken

out in public in favour of GMO technology, and her recent statements, like many of her predecessor, are based on ignorance or merely parrot a slick PR soundbite that comes courtesy of the GM biotech cartel.

At last week's Oxford Farming Conference, Truss supported plans to weaken EU laws that have so far kept commercial GM crops out of Britain.

She stated:

"I think GM crops have a role to play here... If you look at what has happened in the US, crops are being grown in a more environmentally friendly way with less water usage and less pesticide usage. I would like us to have that opportunity. Our farmers need access to technology that will help them work in world markets."

Did she take that passage from a glossy industry brochure?

Probably not, but it wouldn't be the first time an official has read from such a script and used cut-and-paste 'puff' material written by the industry to become what campaigner Aruna Rodrigues calls "uncaged corporate parrots" (see [here](#)), based on her analysis of the politics underlying the GM issue in India. The statement by Truss flies in the face of evidence that associates GM crops with higher pesticide use, the advance of 'super weeds', falling yields and a negative impact of biodiversity and the environment (see [here](#)).

But Truss is correct when she says this technology would certainly help - it would help the GMO biotech corporations (not "farmers" as she states) 'work' in world markets. It would allow Monsanto et al to genetically modify organisms, subsequently slap patents on them and thus secure monopolistic control over seeds, markets and the food supply. This is who Truss is representing - not the British electorate who do not want GMOs (see [here](#)).

On behalf of Big Biotech, the UK government's strategy involves an ongoing attempt to get GM food into the Britain via the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the weakening of pan-European legislation, which to date has prevented GM crops from being grown in most European countries.

The GMO biotech sector staunchly supports the TTIP and is the biggest lobby group in Brussels pushing for this deal (see [here](#)). TTIP is aimed at dismantling regulations, bypassing democratic procedures and threatening governments with legal action if their decisions in any way harm profits (see [here](#)).

Result of new vote will allow for GM cultivation in Europe

As for the weakening of pan-European safeguards concerning GMOs, which the UK government has been spearheading (see [here](#)), on 13 January the European Parliament passed a law that could in effect permit EU-wide GMO crop cultivation - exactly what the UK wanted.

Writing in *The Ecologist* ([here](#)), Oliver Tickell states that with regulation and safeguards now devolved to member states as a result of the vote and only limited 'opt-out' rights on the table, this is a recipe for chaos that GM corporations will ruthlessly exploit.

The proposed law allows individual member states to ban genetically modified crops, but only on very limited grounds that many fear could be subject to legal challenges. The law also opens the door to the possibility of more varieties of GM crops being approved in the EU. Currently only one GM crop is grown in Europe, but a further seven GM varieties are in the pipeline and may be approved early this year. The outcome of the vote will allow the GMO biotech companies to pick off each country one at a time.

Tickell quotes Green UK MEP Keith Taylor as saying:

“This agreement is not all it seems. While giving EU countries new powers to ban GMOs, I believe what this will mean in reality for the UK is more GMOs not fewer. This is because our pro-GM Government are now able to give the go-ahead to more authorisations.”

Lawrence Woodward on the Beyond GM website ([here](#)) says the UK government is setting time aside to clear away all obstacles to the introduction of GMOs to English farms. He reports that in a letter to Beyond GM, Defra (Department for Environment and Rural Affairs) junior minister Lord de Mauley, confirmed that:

“We do not expect any commercial planting of GM crops in the UK for at least a few years as no GM crops in the EU approval pipeline are of major interest to UK farmers... the government will ensure that pragmatic rules are in place to segregate GM and non-GM production.”

Woodward argues that “pragmatic rules” imply as few and as weak as possible with no rules on liability and nothing to ensure that ‘the polluter pays’ in the event of organic and non-GM crops and habitats being contaminated. The so called ‘opt-out’ regulation will now free up countries such as the UK, which in reality wanted to ‘opt-in’ and enable genetically engineered crops to be grown in its fields. Woodward notes that prior to the vote on 13th January, the proposal had already been through a non-transparent process involving a dialogue, where the European Commission (EC), EP and representatives of the Council of Ministers secretly wheel and deal to facilitate the passage of legislation. The process stripped out all mandatory measures to prevent contamination of non-GM crops.

Marco Contiero, Greenpeace EU agriculture policy director, is quoted in Oliver Tickell’s piece in *The Ecologist* as saying:

“Environment ministers say they want to give countries the right to ban GM crop cultivation on their territory, but the text they have agreed does not give governments a legally solid right. It ties their hands by not allowing them to use evidence of environmental harm to ban GM cultivation. This leaves those countries that want to say ‘no’ to GM crops exposed to legal attacks by the biotech industry.”

Tickell also quotes the Green French MEP José Bové:

“In the short term, this change will allow multinationals like Monsanto to challenge national bans at the WTO or, if free trade deals like TTIP are finalised, in arbitration tribunals.”

With the exception of the Greens, all the main political groups in the European Parliament united to back this new GMO law.

Oliver Tickell goes on to state that among the problems in the new law is the absence of strict regulation at the European level. Instead it will be up to member states to impose their own safeguards and regulations.

Tickell quotes GM Freeze Director Liz O'Neill:

"This directive offers no meaningful protection to people who want to make informed choices about what they are eating or to farmers who want to protect their fields from the superweeds and biodiversity loss associated with the kind of GM crops likely to be heading our way. There are no EU-wide mandatory measures to prevent contamination within an individual member state and no rules governing liability.

That means it's down to the UK Government to protect our right to grow and eat GM Free."

And how do you stop cross-border contamination? GM pollen does not respect national borders. But contamination suits the aims of the GMO biotech industry just fine (see [here](#)). It is arguably a deliberate strategy. Peter Melchett from the Soil Association argues that the new law:

"... fails to require countries to ensure that any GM crops grown will not contaminate GM free farms, nor to ensure that the cost of any contamination will fall on the shoulders of the GM companies who own the patented products, not on farmers or food businesses that suffer from pollution.... The rights of farmers who do not wish to grow GM crops, particularly in England, are therefore under threat by this proposal. Indeed, the entire organic sector, growing rapidly in Europe and which may double by 2020, is in danger - as are the rights of anyone who wants to buy GM free foods." (Quoted by Tickell)

Tickell concludes by saying that amid the chaos the law will create, at least one thing is certain: that the situation will be exploited by the GM corporations to introduce GMOs as widely as possible with a minimum of regulation.

The GMO biotech sector's false narrative

Officials like Truss, Paterson and Anne Glover, former Chief Scientific Adviser to the President of the European Commission from 2012 to 2014 (see her views [here](#)), parrot industry claims that are ultimately based on a false narrative: there is or will soon be a food crisis and only GMOs or more petrochemical agriculture can save us.

There is more than enough food currently being produced to feed a projected world population of nine billion, let alone the current one of 7.2 billion. Furthermore, agro-ecological processes (not petrochemical or GM) are key to securing food security for the planet (see [here](#)), without the massive costs in terms of health, the environment, energy use, population displacement, etc. which result from the current petrochemical/GMO system.

I have stated the following in a recent article, but it is worth stating again:

Despite the slick lobbying and PR from Monsanto et al, this isn't about nutrition or 'feeding the world', it's about modifying organisms to create patents that will allow monopolistic control over seeds, markets and the food supply. It's not about objective science stripped of vested interests either. It's ultimately about the geopolitics of oil-dependent agriculture and resultant debt, it's ultimately about seed freedom and it's ultimately about food democracy.

Before finishing, consider the following:

"There is no global or regional shortage of food. There never has been and nor is there ever likely to be. India has a superabundance of food. South America is swamped in food. The US, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe are swamped in food (e.g. Billen et al 2011). In Britain, like in many wealthy countries, nearly half of all row crop food production now goes to biofuels... China isn't quite swamped but it still exports food... No foodpocalypse there either." Jonathon Latham (read his article [here](#) "How the great food war will be won.")

The current global system of chemical-industrial agriculture and World Trade Organisation rules that agritech companies helped draw up for their benefit to force their products into countries (see [here](#)) are a major cause of structural hunger, poverty, illness and environmental destruction. By its very design, the system is meant to suck the life from people, nations and the planet for profit and control (see [here](#)). Some bogus technical quick-fix will not put that right. It represents more of the same. The disease is offered as the cure.

Truss should realise this before jumping into bed with the agritech cartel.

But, as their new handmaiden within what is a staunchly pro-GM government, the suspicion is that she already does.

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