

Monsanto, Syngenta, Pioneer et al.: Through Political Cooptation and Corruption, the GMO Biotech Sector is “Kicking Open the Door to Europe”

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#)

The proposal to hand back some decision powers to member states of the European Union regarding GMO approvals is currently being discussed (1). It will be voted on by member states on 12 June. According to Corporate Europe Observatory, biotech firms regard it as an opportunity to break the stalemate and finally get their GM crops growing in Europe's fields. The proposal has the biotech lobby's fingerprints all over it (2).

The proposal states that for a member state to ban a GMO, it would first have to ask the GM company itself not to market it in its territory. If the company does not agree, the member state's second option is to give certain policy arguments, from a limited set of possibilities. Apart from granting biotech companies the power to resist policies and decisions made by democratically elected governments, the fear is that the types of arguments that governments will be allowed to put forward will bring about legal uncertainty and may simply be swept aside when challenged in court (2). If the company doesn't want its product to be banned, the concern is that the new system will be designed to work in its favour and sovereign governments will be powerless to act.

Documents obtained via Freedom of Information (Fol) acts by GeneWatch in the UK show how the biotech lobby group EuropaBio has been advocating this approach for two years. One of the documents obtained, 'A new strategy on GM issues', concludes that a fresh approach is needed to break the deadlock on GM crops in Europe. In short this involves:

- i) An “amended nationalisation proposal” putting as a condition that member states can only apply for a national ban if they have first asked the company to refrain from marketing the GM crop in their country, and if the company has refused.
- ii) Allowing a contamination threshold agreed on by member states to allow the presence of unauthorised GMOs in seeds (this is already the case for animal feed, but not yet for food and seeds).
- iii) EU member states should no longer vote against a GM crop application (even when they are against it) at a European level if they can use one i) or ii) to gain a national ban.

Fearing that this strategy is merely an attempt to bypass and weaken the current regulatory framework and pick off countries individually, Liz O'Neill of GM Freeze states:

“This is all about getting more GM crops into the ground more quickly. Collective decision making hasn't allowed GM crops to be grown widely in the EU because the majority of EU countries don't want them.”

Dr Helen Wallace of GeneWatch concludes that the UK Government has been working closely with the GM industry “to get a Monsanto-friendly version of the opt-out.” The industry and the UK government are striving to break the deadlock in decisions on GM approvals for cultivation. She says:

“If member states back down from highlighting the environmental harms of RoundUp Ready GM crops, these could be fast-tracked into the ground in some parts of Europe... We need to be improving the GM risk assessments not facilitating contamination of food, feed and seed in the European market with GM crops that nobody wants.”

Collusion between the biotech lobby and government

The set of documents released to GeneWatch indicate a very cosy relationship between the lobby groups EuropaBio and the Agricultural Biotechnology Council (ABC) and the GM team within the UK Ministry of Environment DEFRA. They highlight a series of secretive industry-government meetings and agreements that the public was meant to remain in the dark over.

The ABC is a UK-based lobby group whose membership only comprises the six largest agrochemical multinationals: BASF, Bayer, Dow AgroSciences, Monsanto, Pioneer (DuPont) and Syngenta. The ABC is a member of EuropaBio.

GeneWatch has published a detailed assessment (3) of the many emails released following their FoI request regarding the UK industry lobby’s dealings with the government. They show the extent of receptiveness of people inside the government to industry influence on issues like science and research funding, GM regulation and the pro-GM Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

Owen Paterson is praised in one EuropaBio letter for his “vocal leadership” on GM issues. Paterson was appointed Secretary of State for the Environment in the same year, in September 2012. He has subsequently been accused of being an industry puppet and of totally misrepresenting the reality and efficacy of GMOs (4). Moreover, under Paterson’s leadership, the UK Government has changed its position on the national opt out from being opposed to being in favour.

On a European level, Chief Scientific Advisor to the EU President Anne Glover is also forwarding the case for the GM industry. Like Paterson, her ‘vocal leadership’ is also based on falsehoods and misrepresentations (5).

The GM sector – via DEFRA, the ABC, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Science and Technology in Agriculture (6), strategically placed scientists with their ‘independent’ reports (7) and the industry-backed Science Media Centre (8) – is mounting a full-fledged assault on Britain.

Contamination risks

Shifting from a Europe-wide ban on GMOs to national bans could not only lead to allowing GM crops into Europe, but could also pose other problems. GM Freeze recently launched a briefing that highlights the very real risk of cross-border contamination between GM and non-GM food crops.

The briefing 'Contamination Matters – Why GM can't be managed at a national level' (9) has been published in advance of the EU vote on 12 June. It highlights the risks associated with cross-border contamination by examining three detailed examples of real contamination events that caused significant disruption to food supply, farmers' livelihoods and the broader agricultural economy, including international trade. The contamination incidents detailed in the briefing involve experimental GM strains of American rice, Chinese rice and Canadian flax. All were supposed to be grown under tightly controlled trial conditions but ended up in food.

GM Freeze Director Liz O'Neill comments:

"The idea of individual countries being able to ban GM sounds appealing, but sadly it won't work. Pollen and seed don't respect national boundaries any more than they give way on a roundabout, and experience shows that once the GM genie is out there we cannot put it back in the bottle. The costs can be huge."

Letting the 'genie out of the bottle; is exactly what the GMO sector wants, though. Contamination works to its advantage (10), has worked to its advantage and is an issue that is affecting the entire globe (11,12).

Liz O'Neill is concerned that many people don't understand what a 'yes' to this proposal on 12 June would mean:

"GM supporters, including our own Environment Minister Owen Paterson, are throwing away the whole concept of a common market to further their own support for a technology that raises far more questions than it answers. Their refusal to first put in place a reasonable, clear liability regime to protect the food system and the environment speaks volumes."

Such concerns mirror what is happening elsewhere in the world, not least in India. There, 200 crops are to be open field tested, despite warnings from the Supreme Court appointed Technical Expert Committee and recommendations about risks, protocols and regulations (13).

As is the case with the UK, in India GMO biotech corporations are forming government backed 'public-private partnerships' to gain a financially lucrative, strategic stranglehold in agriculture, not least in setting the research and policy development agenda, in an attempt to force GM products into the country (14,15). And, as in the UK, the whole situation reeks of vested interests and the government working hand in glove with the GMO biotech sector (16)

Environmentalist Aruna Rodrigues may be speaking about India in the following passage, but her words could also easily apply to other countries, not least the UK:

"Ministries, least of all 'promoting' Ministries, should not have the authority to allow the novel technology of GMOs into Indian agriculture bypassing authentic democratic processes. Those processes require the widest possible and transparent consultation... After all, it is every woman, man and child, and our animals, an entire nation that will quite literally have to eat the outcome of a GM policy that delivers up our agriculture to it: if a GMO is unsafe, it will remain

irreversibly unsafe. And it will remain in the environment and that is another dimension of impact." (17)

From India to Europe, democratic processes are being bypassed, the public is being sidelined and lied to and agriculture is being delivered up to powerful biotech corporations. This issue is global. It affects everyone.

Be informed and take action:

<http://www.gmfreeze.org/>

<http://corporateeurope.org/>

<http://www.genewatch.org/>

<http://www.gmwatch.org/>

http://indiagminfo.org/?page_id=175

Notes

1) <http://www.gmfreeze.org/actions/42/>

2)

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

3) http://www.genewatch.org/uploads/f03c6d66a9b354535738483c1c3d49e4/Fol_summary_May14.pdf

4)

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-realities-of-gmo-and-petro-chemical-agriculture-allergies-toxins-new-diseases/5367760>

5) <http://naturalsociety.com/letter-eu-chief-science-says-biotech-lying-gmos/>

6) <http://www.genewatch.org/article.shtml?als%5Bcid%5D=492860&als%5Bitemid%5D=571543>

7) <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2581387/Scientists-hidden-links-GM-food-giants-Disturbing-truth-official-report-said-UK-forge-Frankenfoods.html>

8) <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/405309/scientists-sale-way-multinationals-039buy039.html>

9) http://www.gmfreeze.org/site_media/uploads/publications/2014_contam_final.pdf

10)

<http://www.greenmedinfo.com/blog/contamination-and-bio-pollution-criminality-gm-biotech-industry>

11) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-death-of-rice-in-india/9562>

12) <http://www.navdanya.org/blog/?p=1001>

13) <http://www.countercurrents.org/todhunter040314.htm>

14) <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/walmart-and-monsanto-on-indous-agriculture-initiative-board/article3176462.ece>

15) <http://dissidentvoice.org/2009/07/monsanto-a-contemporary-east-india-company-and-corporate-knowledge-in-india/>

16)

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/Filmmaker-Mahesh-Bhatt-calls-Veerappa-Moily-a-corporate-mole/articleshow/31215130.cms?>

17) <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/nip-this-in-the-bud/article5012989.ece#comments>

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