

Monsanto's Gamble: Biotech Lobby Pushes Genetically Modified GM Food into Europe

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Before beginning to read this article, bear in mind that we do not need GM food.

The world is quite capable of feeding itself without GMOs: for example, look, [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) for the evidence. Now to the article...

Everything we do involves risk. When we board a plane, we take a risk. However, we assume that the plane we are about to board has complied with a certain level of safety standards in stringent test conditions. One or two planes might crash over a period due to a design fault or some other human error, for example, but the vast majority do not; therefore, we do not ban planes. It is not necessary.

This kind of cost-benefit analysis is pivotal in determining public policy. Certain items or goods are allowed onto the market for public consumption because there is assumed to be no serious widespread risk to the public. The risk is not systemic. Where would we be if everything were to be log-jammed for years while tests were carried out to determine the efficacy and safety of each and every product destined for public consumption?

There are particular products that should be held back, though, and the precautionary principle applied. This principle is based on the notion that there is a good chance that a certain item may pose widespread harm to the entire population if released for public consumption. For example, there is enough evidence to suggest that releasing genetically modified (GM) foods onto the market could seriously damage the entire population's health [1,2,3]. The risk is systemic. In this case, adequate testing should be carried out over a period of years.

What we get, however, is the biotech sector raking in millions in profits from its GM patented seeds and attempting to control the 'science' around its products by carrying out inadequate, secretive studies of its own, placing restrictions on any independent research into its products and censoring findings that indicate the deleterious impacts of its products [4]. It has also faked data [5], engages in attacking scientists who reach conclusions not to its liking [6,7] and carries out (unapproved) open-field testing, resulting in the contamination of non-GMO crops [8]. We also get regulatory bodies accepting at face value claims from the biotech sector about its products [9] and politicians or officials like Owen Paterson in the UK or Anne Glover at the European level spouting misleading claims and falsehoods about GM food in order to further the sector's objectives [10,11].

In the US, policy makers released GM food onto the commercial market without proper long-

term tests. The argument used to justify this is GM food is 'substantially equivalent' to ordinary food. (This argument is not based on scientific reason but is a trade strategy on behalf of the GM sector: it neatly serves to remove its genetically modified organisms (GMOs) from the type of scrutiny usually applied to potentially toxic or harmful substances [12]). To say that GM food is 'substantially equivalent' to normal food is nonsensical. What we had been eating prior to the GM biotech sector's contamination of the food supply was food that resulted from selective breeding of crops and nature's natural processes that had taken place over thousands of years. Humans had learnt what worked and what did not over this period. Furthermore, such breeding has tended to place between organisms of the same species. This has not always been the case, but again we learnt what worked and what did not, what to eat and what not to eat. And the changes to our food were very gradual.

GM food is not 'substantially equivalent'. Recent studies highlight this in terms of their harmful content [12]. Moreover, inserting fish genes into a tomato is not a natural process. The fact that biotech companies patent such a process underscores this. Unlike normally grown food, genetically engineered food is produced by white-coated scientists in a laboratory. The biotech sector wants a mass release of GM food onto the market more or less at once. It is not gradual but dramatic.

The result is untested genetic combinations that negatively impact our bodies (and the environment) in unforeseen ways. So, if we are thinking of releasing GM foods onto the commercial market, wouldn't it be wise to adopt a precautionary principle? Of course it would. The reason it hasn't occurred in the US is not down to science but down to the power and political influence of the GMO biotech sector.

And now the sector is attempting to force its GM food into Europe.

Some pro-GM scientists-cum-lobbyists are often heard calling for 'sound' science and 'open' debate to determine arguments concerning GM food. They criticise anti-GMO activists for being too vocal, ideological and closing down debate. While spouting some fine-sounding platitudes about 'sound science', the US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack talks about eliminating all 'unnecessary barriers' to trade between the US and the EU, yet he does not want people to know the truth about what they are eating (ie by labelling GM food) because informing the public would send out the 'wrong impression' [13].

In response, Andy Stirling, Professor of Science and Technology Policy at Sussex University has stated that in order to sideline open discussion of the issues surrounding GMOs, related interests are now trying to deny the many uncertainties and suppress scientific diversity. This undermines democratic debate and science itself [14].

It is the GM biotech industry that closes down debate by hiding behind 'commercial confidentiality' to keep the public and independent scientists in the dark about its products. Why has it employed tactics of intimidation, fakery, illegal planting, censorship and the co-optation of regulatory bodies and officials to get its products onto the market, if sound science and open debate is so important to it?

When US lobbyists push for 'sound science' as the basis for food supply trade rules, what they mean by this term is that they want Europe to eliminate all restrictions on imports of food from the US and to adopt a US-style food supply regulatory regime, stripped of the precautionary principle. The watchdog/campaign body Corporate Europe Observatory says that US corporations want to make it difficult for European consumers to identify whether

what they're eating is food that was produced using health-damaging practices EU consumers are against, like GMO maize, chlorine-washed chicken and meat from animals treated with growth hormone. If they were to be able to identify what they are eating and were to know how it is produced, to use Vilsack's double-speak, they would get the 'wrong impression' no doubt.

As far as the precautionary principle is concerned, take the case of the herbicide Roundup, which many GM crops are genetically engineered to withstand. In 2011, Earth Open Source said that official approval of glyphosate (the main ingredient in Roundup) had been deeply flawed. It suggested that industry regulators in Europe had known for years that glyphosate causes birth defects in the embryos of laboratory animals.

Despite its widespread use, there is currently little monitoring of glyphosate in food, water or the wider environment. According to a peer-reviewed report published last year in the scientific journal *Entropy* [15], residues of glyphosate have been found in food. These residues enhance the damaging effects of other food-borne chemical residues and toxins in the environment to disrupt normal body functions and induce disease. The study says that negative impact on the body is insidious and manifests slowly over time as inflammation damages cellular systems throughout the body. Of course, hardly a month goes by without a new study being published linking glyphosate with kidney disease, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, autism, etc. Take your pick from an increasingly long list.

In Mississippi, 75 percent of air and rain samples contained levels of glyphosate that could have serious physiological consequences for humans [16]. Even if you are careful about what you eat, there is no escaping it. From 2000 to 2009, following the expansion of genetically-modified soy and rice crops (and thus the use of glyphosate) in the Chaco region of Argentina, the childhood cancer rate tripled in La Leonesa and the rate of birth defects increased nearly fourfold over the entire province [17].

If regulatory bodies had adopted the precautionary principle, millions of people's health would not now be jeopardized. Like the tobacco industry before, however, those whose profits are threatened will roll out their scientists to confuse the issue by saying the links are not proven and the diseases are due to something else and their products are perfectly safe, even though there have never been proper independent studies carried out to verify their claims about product safety.

Earlier this year, a group of Chinese food safety volunteers submitted a request to China's Ministry of Agriculture to disclose the study that justified issuing the safety certificate for the import into China of Monsanto's Roundup [18]. The Ministry in turn asked Monsanto who replied that the study constituted its own commercial secret.

In Europe, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) - which is riddled with conflicts of interest [19] - was asked to disclose the two key chronic toxicity studies on glyphosate that the German regulatory agencies relied upon to set the Acceptable Daily Intake of the chemical. Again this request was refused for similar reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Earth Open Source examined Germany's summary report on the studies, which is in the public domain. It was discovered that the German regulator consistently dismissed evidence of birth defects using unscientific reasoning.

Former US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) worker Evaggelos Vallianatos quotes the

EPA scientist Adrian Gross as saying that his colleagues, EPA toxicologists, “go straight to the company’s summary and lift it word for word and give it as their own evaluation of those studies.” [18]

In the warped double-speak world of the likes of Tom Vilsack, maybe we should not expect regulators to conduct independent analyses of risks and properly apply a precautionary principle. Perhaps we should expect them to consult a company’s glossy PR brochure, give a product the nod and then we should quite literally suck it and see... and hope for the best. In fact, isn’t that what Vallianatos says the EPA does anyway? The former boss on Monsanto in India said that what happened there too [5]. In the meantime, the likes of the Seralini team with their peer-reviewed science will come up with results that give the ‘wrong impression’.

As the biotech lobby attempts to get its unwanted GM food into Europe by eradicating ‘regulatory barriers’ via the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement [20] and also by weakening regulatory procedures at the European level that would give biotech companies undue power over decision-making [21], the health of entire nations is at stake.

Must our health be sacrificed by weak-willed, co-opted politicians and regulators for the sake of corporate profit? Maybe Owen Paterson, Tom Vilsack, Anne Glover, Bill Gates, Hilary Clinton and other prominent pro-GMO mouthpieces think that type of question sends out the wrong impression too?

Notes

1] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/potential-health-hazards-of-genetically-engineered-foods/8148>

2] <http://www.gmoseralini.org/republication-seralini-study-science-speaks/>

3] http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article_18101.cfm

4]

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/gmo-scandal-the-long-term-effects-of-genetically-modified-food-on-humans/14570>

5] <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/Monsanto+%27faked%27+data+for+approvals+claims+its+ex-chief/1/83093.html>

6] <http://www.gmwatch.org/latest-listing/1-news-items/12715-seralini-vs-fellous-a-gmo-libel-case-over-independent-expertise-and-science>

7] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/gmo-researchers-attacked-evidence-denied-and-a-population-at-risk/5305324>

8] http://www.naturalnews.com/028585_GMOs_Bayer.html

9]

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/monsantos-roundup-herbicide-and-regulators-with-something-to-hide/5389977>

10]

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9733589/Food-minister-Owen-Paterson-backs-GM-crops.html>

- 11] <http://www.gmwatch.org/index.php/news/archive/2014/15308-eu-chief-science-adviser-s-gmo-safety-claims-are-a-lie>
- 12] http://www.i-sis.org.uk/Substantial_Non-Equivalence.php
- 13] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/17/uk-eu-usa-trade-idUSKBN0ES1G920140617>
- 14] <http://www.earthopensource.org/index.php/news/150>
- 15] <http://www.mdpi.com/1099-4300/15/4/1416>
- 16] <http://www.greenmedinfo.com/blog/roundup-weedkiller-found-75-air-and-rain-samples-gov-study-finds>
- 17] <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-147561-2010-06-14.html>
- 18] <http://www.gmwatch.org/index.php/news/archive/2014/15519-the-glyphosate-toxicity-studies-you-re-not-allowed-to-see>
- 19] <http://corporateeurope.org/efsa/2013/10/unhappy-meal-european-food-safety-authoritys-independence-problem>
- 20] <http://corporateeurope.org/trade/2013/05/open-door-gmos-take-action-eu-us-free-trade-agreement>
- 21] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/new-gmo-legislation-would-put-power-hands-biotech-companies>

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