

Newly Leaked Cable: Pope ‘quietly supportive’ of GMOs

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Just released (December 2010), a [November 19, 2009 leaked cable](#) indicates Pope Benedict XVI supports genetically modified foods, though he will not publicly admit it. A [June 2009 cable](#) from the US Vatican Embassy confirmed the Pontiff’s refusal to take a stance on GM foods, which was [verified](#) in December 2010 by a Vatican spokesperson. However, this latest cable tells quite a different story:

“Linking development with use of agricultural technologies (i.e., biotechnologies), Benedict stressed good governance and further infrastructure development as essential to increasing food security over the long-term. (Note: Benedict’s mention of agricultural technologies is a small but significant step towards more vocal Vatican support of biotechnologies. End Note)”

The analyst further concludes:

“While the Vatican’s message on caring for the environment is loud and clear, its message on biotechnologies is still low-profile (ref. b). Quietly supportive, the Church considers the choice of whether to embrace GMOs as a technical decision for farmers and governments.”

Providing much more analysis than the June 2009 cable, the November 2009 cable indicates strong support within the Vatican scientific community, which apparently remains unaware of the biotech industry’s penchant for [suppressing science](#):

“The Vatican’s own scientific academy has stated that there is no evidence GMOs are harmful, and that they could indeed be part of addressing global food security. However, when individual Church leaders, for ideological reasons or ignorance, speak out against GMOs, the Vatican does not — at least not yet — feel that it is its duty to challenge them.”

Vatican proponents of GM foods may have missed several scientific reports [1] that highlight problems with GMOs. As previously reported, several times:

“GM foods have been linked to [organ damage](#) and [sterility](#) in mammals, while others correlate rising [diabetes and obesity](#) rates with GMO introduction. There’s also the question of [allergic reaction to GM foods](#), proof of which is hidden by lack of labeling.

“GM crops (and [GM forests](#)) are genetically modified to produce or tolerate pesticides. Glyphosate, the main ingredient in Monsanto’s Roundup, has been [linked to birth defects, cancer and miscarriages](#) in humans. [Pesticides are suspected](#) in causing or contributing to mass bee, bat and butterfly die-off, as well as a pandemic amphibian decline. Their use is also linked to [11 million acres of superweeds](#) in the U.S.

“Further, GM crops cannot be contained. They’ve spread in nations all over the world, even becoming [established in the wild](#).”

Given such strong evidence of environmental harm, the Pope’s strong advocacy of the environment would logically include opposition to GM crops. In fact, we find the opposite.

This latest cable further confirms that globally promoting genetically modified foods is a high priority for the US State Department. As discussed in a [prior piece](#), numerous leaked cables reveal a strong focus by embassy officials on cataloging how nations perceive GMOs, boosting GM acceptance in Africa, and even going so far as to discuss spiking food prices to spur GM acceptance in Europe. The latest cable is no different:

“Post will continue to lobby the Vatican to speak up in favor of GMOs, in the hope that a louder voice in Rome will encourage individual Church leaders elsewhere to reconsider their critical views. End Comment.”

Strong opposition within the church cites the monopoly control over food held by multinational corporations:

“The Vatican cannot force all bishops to endorse biotechnology, he said, particularly if their opposition has to do with concerns over protecting profits of large corporations who hold the patents for the crops, versus feeding the hungry. In the Philippines, he noted, bishops strongly protested GMOs in the past. (Note: South African Cardinal Wilfrid Fox Napier’s November 16 comments to a news agency that ‘Africans do not need GMOs, but water’ is another example of specific Church leaders skeptical about the potential benefits of new biotechnologies. End note.)”

Corporate control of the food supply is only one problem with biotech foods, albeit a major one. After fourteen years of commercial experience, the U.S. is fast becoming the poster child for why nations, and the Church, should reject such technology.

NOTES:

[1] See, e.g.: [GM Soy: Sustainable? Responsible?](#) Summary of scientific evidence on genetically modified soy and the effects of the herbicide glyphosate, Sept. 2010

[Impacts of Genetically Engineered Crops on Pesticide Use: The First Thirteen Years](#), The Organic Center, November 2009

[Failure to Yield: Evaluating the Performance of Genetically Engineered Crops](#), Union of Concerned Scientists, April 2009

[50 Harmful Effects of Genetically Modified Foods](#) by Nathan Batalion, 2000, rev. 2009

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