

# Pouring Poison and Planting Seeds of Dependency. Big Agriculture Destroys Organic Farming

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#)

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*Do you remember the iconic Union Carbide image from the 1950s or early 1960s? The one with the giant hand coming from the sky, pouring pesticides onto Indian soil.*

The blurb below the image includes the following:

“Science helps build a new India - India has developed bold new plans to build its economy and bring the promise of a bright future to its more than 400 million people. But India needs the technical knowledge of the western world. For example working with Indian engineers and technicians, Union Carbide recently made available its fast scientific resource to help build a chemicals and plastics plant near Bombay. Throughout the free world, Union Carbide has been actively engaged in building plants for the manufacture of chemicals, plastics, carbons, gases and metals.”



### Science helps build a new India

Oxen working the fields . . . the eternal river Ganges . . . jeweled elephants on parade. Today these symbols of ancient India exist side by side with a new sight—modern industry. India has developed bold new plans to build its economy and bring the promise of a bright future to its more than 400,000,000 people. ▶ But India needs the technical knowledge of the western world. For example, working with Indian engineers and technicians, Union Carbide recently made available its vast scientific resources to help build a major chemicals and plastics plant near Bombay. ▶ Throughout the free world, Union Carbide has been actively engaged in building plants for the manufacture of chemicals, plastics, carbons, gases, and metals. The people of Union Carbide welcome the opportunity to use their knowledge and skills in partnership with the citizens of so many great countries.

A HAND IN THINGS TO COME



*WRITE for booklet B-3 "The Exciting Universe of Union Carbide," which tells how research in the fields of polymers, chemicals, gases, metals, plastics and nuclear energy helps bringing new wonders into your life.*

*Union Carbide Corporation, 270 Park Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.*

In the bottom corner is the Union Carbide logo and the statement 'A HAND IN THINGS TO COME'.

This 'hand of god' image has become infamous. Union Carbide's 'hand in things to come' includes the gas leak at its pesticides plant in Bhopal in 1984. It resulted in around 560,000 injured (respiratory problems, eye irritation, etc), 4,000 severely disabled and 20,000 dead.

As for the chemical-intensive agriculture it promoted, we can now see the impacts: degraded soils, polluted water, illness, farmer debt and suicides (by drinking pesticides!), nutrient-dense crops/varieties being side-lined, a narrower range of crops, no increase in food production per capita (in [India at least](#)), the corporate commodification of knowledge and seeds, the erosion of farmers' environmental learning, the undermining of traditional

knowledge systems and farmers' dependency on corporations.

Whether it involves the type of ecological devastation activist-farmer [Bhaskar Save](#) outlined for policy makers in his 2006 open letter or the social upheaval documented by [Vandana Shiva](#) in the book *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, the consequences have been far-reaching.

And yet – whether it involves new genetic engineering techniques or more pesticides – there is a **relentless drive by the agritech conglomerates to further entrench their model of agriculture by destroying traditional farming** practices with the aim of placing more farmers on corporate seed and chemical treadmills.

These corporations have been pushing for the European Commission to remove any labelling and safety checks for new genomic techniques. The European Court of Justice ruled in 2018 that organisms obtained with new genetic modification techniques must be regulated under the EU's existing GMO laws. However, there has been intense lobbying from the agriculture biotech industry to weaken the legislation, [aided financially by the Gates Foundation](#).

Since 2018, top agribusiness and biotech corporations have spent almost €37 million lobbying the European Union. They have had 182 meetings with European Commissioners, their cabinets and director generals. More than one meeting a week.

In recent weeks, Syngenta (a subsidiary of ChemChina) CEO Erik Fyrwald has come to the fore to cynically lobby for these techniques.

But before discussing Fyrwald, let us turn to another key agribusiness figure who has been in the news. Former Monsanto chairman and CEO Hugh Grant recently appeared in court to be questioned by lawyers on behalf of a cancer patient in the case of Allan Shelton v Monsanto.

Shelton has non-Hodgkin lymphoma and is one of the 100,000-plus people in the US claiming in lawsuits that exposure to Monsanto's Roundup weedkiller and its other brands containing the chemical glyphosate caused their cancer.

His lawyers argued that Grant was an active participant and decision maker in the company's Roundup business and should be made to testify at the trial.

Why not? After all, he did make a financial killing from peddling poison.

Bayer acquired Monsanto in 2018 and Grant received an [estimated \\$77 million](#) post-sale payoff. Bloomberg reported in 2017 that Monsanto had increased Grant's salary to \$19.5 million.

By 2009, Roundup-related products, which include genetically modified seeds developed to withstand glyphosate-based applications, represented about [half of Monsanto's gross margin](#).

Roundup was integral to Monsanto's business model and Grant's enormous income and final payoff.

Consider the following quote from a [piece](#) that appeared on the Bloomberg website in 2014:

“Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Hugh Grant is focused on selling more genetically modified seeds in Latin America to drive earnings growth outside the core US market. Sales of soybean seeds and genetic licenses climbed 16%, and revenue in the unit that makes glyphosate weed killer, sold as Roundup, rose 24%.”

In the same piece, Chris Shaw, a New York-based analyst at Monness Crespi Hardt & Co, is reported as saying “Glyphosate really crushed it” – meaning the sales of glyphosate were a major boost.

All fine for Grant and Monsanto. But this has had devastating effects on human health. ‘The Human Cost of Agrotoxins. How Glyphosate is killing Argentina’, which appeared on the Lifegate website in November 2015, serves as a damning indictment of the drive for “earnings growth” by Monsanto. Moreover, in the same year, some 30,000 doctors in that country [demanded a ban](#) on glyphosate.

The bottom line for Grant was sales and profit maximisation and the unflinching defence of glyphosate, no matter how carcinogenic to humans it is and, more to the point, how much [Monsanto knew it was](#).

[Noam Chomsky](#) underlines the commercial imperative:

“ ... the CEO of a corporation has actually a legal obligation to maximize profit and market share. Beyond that legal obligation, if the CEO doesn’t do it, and, let’s say, decides to do something that will, say, benefit the population and not increase profit, he or she is not going to be CEO much longer – they’ll be replaced by somebody who does do it.”

Syngenta’s CEO is cut from the same cloth as Grant. While Monsanto’s crimes are well documented, Syngenta’s transgressions are less well publicised.

[In 2006](#), writer and campaigner Dr Brian John claimed:

“GM Free Cymru has discovered that Syngenta, in its promotion of GM crops and foods, has been involved in a web of lies, deceptions and obstructive corporate behaviour that would have done credit to its competitor Monsanto.”

Some weeks ago, Fyrwald [called](#) for organic farming to be abandoned. In view of the food crisis, brought on by the war in Ukraine, he claimed rich countries had to increase their crop production – but organic farming led to lower yields. Fyrwald also called for gene editing to be at the heart of the food agenda in order to increase food production.

He stated:

“The indirect consequence is that people are starving in Africa because we are eating more and more organic products.”

In response, Kilian Baumann, a Bernese organic farmer and president of the Swiss Small Farmers’ Association, called Fyrwald’s arguments “grotesque”. He claimed Fyrwald was “fighting for sales”.

Writing on the [GMWatch website](#), Jonathan Matthews says the Russian invasion of Ukraine

seems to have emboldened Fyrwald's scaremongering.

Matthews states:

"Fyrwald's comments reflect the industry's determination to undermine the European Union's Farm to Fork strategy, which aims by 2030 not just to slash pesticide use by 50% and fertilizer use by 20% but to more than triple the percentage of EU farmland under organic management (from 8.1% to 25%), as part of the [transition](#) towards a 'more sustainable food system' within the EU's Green Deal."

He adds:

"Syngenta view[s] these goals as an almost existential threat. This has led to a carefully orchestrated attack on the EU strategy."

The details of this PR offensive have been laid out in a report by the Brussels-based lobby watchdog Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO): [A loud lobby for a silent spring: The pesticide industry's toxic lobbying tactics against Farm to Fork](#).

Mathews quotes research that shows GM crops have no yield benefit. He also refers to a newly published [report](#) that draws together research clearly showing GM crops have driven substantial increases - not decreases - in pesticide use. The newer and much-hyped gene-edited crops look set to do the same.

Syngenta is among the corporations criticised by a [report](#) from the UN for "systematic denial of harms" and "unethical marketing tactics". Matthews notes that selling highly hazardous pesticides is actually at the core of Syngenta's business model.

According to Matthews, even with the logistical disruptions to maize and wheat crops caused by the war in Ukraine, there is still enough grain available to the world market to meet existing needs. He says the current price crisis (not food crisis) is a product of fear and [speculation](#).

Matthews concludes:

"If Erik Fyrwald is really so concerned about hunger, why isn't he attacking the [boondoggle](#) that is biofuels, rather than going after organic farming? The obvious answer is that the farmers being subsidised to grow biofuels are big consumers of agrichemicals and, in the US case, GMO seeds - unlike organic farmers, who buy neither."

Fyrwald has a financial imperative to lobby for particular strategies and technologies. He is far from an objective observer. And he is far from honest in his appraisal - using fear of a food crisis to push his agenda.

Meanwhile, the sustained attacks on organic agriculture have become an industry mainstay, despite [numerous high-level reports](#) and projects indicating it could feed the world, mitigate climate change, improve farmers' situations, lead to better soil, create employment and provide healthier and more diverse diets.

There is a food crisis but not the one alluded to by Fyrwald - [denutriented](#) food and [unhealthy diets](#) that are at the centre of a major public health crisis, a loss of [biodiversity](#) which

threatens food security, [degraded](#) soils, [polluted](#) and [depleted](#) water sources and [smallholder farmers](#), so vital to global food production (especially in the Global South), [squeezed off their land](#) and out of farming.

Transnational agribusiness has lobbied for, directed and profited from policies that have caused much of the above. And what we now see is these corporations and their lobbyists espousing (fake) concern (a cynical lobbying tactic) for the plight of the poor and hungry while attempting to purchase EU democracy to the tune of €37 million. Cheap at the price considering the financial bonanza that its new patented genetic engineering technologies and seeds could reap.

Various scientific publications show these new techniques allow developers to make significant genetic changes, which can be very different from those that happen in nature. These new [GMOs pose similar or greater risks than older-style GMOs](#).

By attempting to dodge regulation as well as avoid economic, social, environmental and health impact assessments, it is clear were the industry's priorities lie.

Unfortunately, Fyrwald, Bill Gates, Hugh Grant and their ilk are unwilling and too often incapable of viewing the world beyond their reductionist mindsets that merely regard seed/chemical sales, output-yield and corporate profit as the measuring stick of success.

What is required is an approach that sustains indigenous knowledge, local food security, better nutrition per acre, clean and stable water tables and good soil structure. An approach that places food sovereignty, local ownership, rural communities and rural economies at the centre of policy and which nurtures biodiversity, boosts human health and works with nature rather than destroying these.

Fyrwald's scaremongering is par for the course - the world will starve without corporate chemicals and (GM) seeds, especially if organics takes hold. This type of stuff has been standard fare from the industry and its lobbyists and bought career scientists for many years.

It flies in the face of reality, not least how certain agribusiness concerns have been part of a US geopolitical strategy that undermines food security in regions across the world. These concerns have thrived on the [creation of dependency and profited from conflict](#). Moreover, there is the success of agroecological approaches to farming that have no need for what Fyrwald is hawking.

Instead, the industry continues to promote itself as the saviour of humanity - a hand of god powered by a brave new techno-utopian world of corporate science, pouring poison and planting seeds of corporate dependency with the missionary zeal of Western saviourism.

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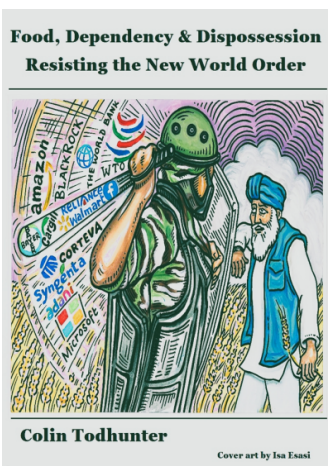
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Read Colin Todhunter's e-Book entitled

## Food, Dispossession and Dependency. Resisting the New World Order

We are currently seeing an acceleration of the corporate consolidation of the entire global agri-food chain. The high-tech/big data conglomerates, including Amazon, Microsoft, Facebook and Google, [have joined traditional agribusiness giants](#), such as Corteva, Bayer, Cargill and Syngenta, in a quest to impose their model of food and agriculture on the world.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is also involved (documented in '[Gates to a Global Empire](#)' by Navdanya International), whether through [buying up huge tracts of farmland](#), promoting a much-heralded ([but failed](#)) '[green revolution](#)' for Africa, pushing [biosynthetic food](#) and [genetic engineering technologies](#) or more generally [facilitating the aims of the mega agri-food corporations](#).

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