

The GMO Issue: False Claims, Pseudo Analysis, A Politically Motivated Agenda

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Critics of GM promote pseudo-science, make false claims based on ignorance and are driven by politically motivated ideology. The actions of these affluent elitists effectively deny food to the hungry. They are therefore committing crimes against humanity. If you follow the GM issue, no doubt you've heard this kind of simplistic, tired and predictable diatribe before.

A good deal of the debate surrounding GMOs involves attacking critics of the technology who voice genuine concerns and put forward valid arguments to back up their case. The attacks by the pro-GM lobby are nonsensical because there is sufficient, credible evidence that questions the safety, efficacy and the science used to promote GM, as well as the politics and practices used to get GMOs on the commercial market.

This evidence has been validated many times before by peer-reviewed studies and official reports. Furthermore, many of the slick PR claims made by the pro-GM lobby have been [deconstructed](#) and [found to be seriously wanting](#). Such evidence has been referred or linked on many occasions in my numerous [previous articles](#), and I see no need to regurgitate this here.

Attacks on opponents of GM are designed to whip up emotive, populist sentiment and denigrate critics with the aim of diverting attention from the underlying issues pertaining to hunger and poverty, as well as ideology, commercial interests and political motivations of the pro-GM lobby itself.

Lobbyist Patrick Moore has called GMWatch "[murdering bastards](#)." Journalist William Saletan portrays those who question GM as heretics clinging to faith and relying on an "army of quacks and pseudo-environmentalists waging a leftist war on science." Claire Robinson has taken apart his pro-GM ideology and evangelising [here](#), which is little more than disinformation masquerading as objective journalism.

Former UK environment minister Owen Paterson has described critics of GM as a 'green blob' bunch of affluent elitists who are [anti-science Luddites](#). Then there is Fellow of the Royal Society Sir Richard John Roberts, who calls for [less politics in science](#), implying that critics have a political agenda. He says they should stop scaremongering and forwarding propaganda.

Roberts [recently said](#) that if you don't want to eat GMOs, then don't – conveniently ignoring that fact that Monsanto has denied choice by spending at least \$100 million in the US to prevent labelling of GM food. He says that GM is probably safer than traditional foods, which [it clearly isn't](#), and has expressed dismay over the delay in the production of Golden Rice. Mirroring the propaganda of the GM sector, Roberts says though Golden Rice became

a reality in February 1999 and could have been used as early as 2002, the opposition to GM has ensured that it is not currently available, which again is simply [not the case](#).

He claims more than 15 million children have died or suffered globally due to vitamin A deficiency since 2002. Roberts asks: "How many must die before we consider this a crime against humanity that should be prosecuted?" His claims are [baseless and his tactic is deliberately inflammatory](#).

Another prominent scientist-cum-lobbyist, [Anthony Trewavas](#), uses similar tactics by calling on critics to defer to (pro-GM) scientists and stop forcing their authoritarian views on people, thus denying choice and GM to consumers and farmers alike. In a similar vein, [C S Prakash](#) has used politically-motivated attacks on opponents and made numerous claims in favour of GM in high-profile media outlets that he does not appear to want to back up.

If scaremongering and propaganda are occurring, Roberts, Trewavas, Prakash and others should look a little closer to home because what they are doing is engaging in a high-profile roll-out of [psychological projection](#): accusing opponents of the very things the pro-GM lobby is guilty of doing in order to shift the focus of attention.

The bedrock of the industry and its supporters is driven by politics, commercial gain and ideology. It's very foundation is based on a [fraud](#) and the [capturing and corrupting](#) of international and national bodies, including the WTO, trade deals, governments and regulatory bodies.

And, arguably, it is also driven by fear. "They are scared to death," [says Marion Nestle](#), professor of nutrition, food studies, and public health at New York University and author of several books on food policy. She adds:

"They have an industry to defend and are attacking in the hope that they'll neutralize critics... It's a paranoid industry and has been from the beginning."

While massive financial clout and the capture of key political institutions (thereby curtailing the option of prioritising more [productive](#) and [sustainable models](#) of agriculture) constitute the power base of global agribusiness corporations, we also must not overlook the role of prominent individuals, whether scientists or [media figures](#).

These foot soldiers of the GM industry try to set the GM debate by painting critics as irrational, ignorant and politically motivated, whereas they (scientists especially) are supposedly objective and untainted by vested interests ([clearly untrue](#)). And they have been quite successful at getting this message into the mainstream media.

Readers are urged to check websites such as [Lobbywatch](#), [Powerbase](#) and [Spinwatch](#), where they will see links between some prominent GM scientist-lobbyists and big agribusiness companies, the ultra-right group the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the [Scientific Alliance](#) (described as a front group for corporate interests) and Bivings Group (a public relations company that worked with Monsanto), among others.

And these connections have resulted in well-orchestrated smear campaigns against individuals and groups (see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)), pro -GM propaganda ([see this about the sweet potato](#)) and [dirty tricks](#) (for example, using fake identities to attacks critics of GM). At the same time, those responsible for such things carefully manage the message that they

themselves are the [persecuted victims](#) of ideologically-driven anti-GM campaigners.

The doublespeak and hypocrisy is plain to see.

If anything matters to the pro-GM lobby, contrary to the public persona it tries to convey, it clearly has little to do with 'choice', 'democracy' or objective science. It has more to do with undermining and debasing these concepts.

And if it were to genuinely embrace these values, along with 'humanitarianism', a concept it also lays claim to, it would flag up and protest against the corporate capture of science and the infiltration by commercial interests of institutions and regulatory bodies, and it would also protest against the way trade and aid is used to [subjugate regions](#) and the most productive components of global agriculture - the [small/peasant farmer](#) - to the needs of powerful commercial entities.

For all of its talk about GM 'feeding the world' and scaremongering about the actions of anti-GM activists leading to the deaths of "[billions](#)" due to their resistance to GM, the pro-GM lobby sidesteps the true nature of hunger and poverty. It is only by understanding the issues raised by [Eric Holt-Giménez](#) in the article from which the following quote comes from that we can begin to see how ridiculous the claims of Moore, Trewavas, Roberts and the rest really are:

"The World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the World Food Program, the Millennium Challenge, The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and industrial giants like Yara Fertilizer, Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, Syngenta, DuPont, and Monsanto, carefully avoid addressing the root causes of the food crisis. The "solutions" they prescribe are rooted in the same policies and technologies that created the problem in the first place: increased food aid, de-regulated global trade in agricultural commodities, and more technological and genetic fixes. These measures only strengthen the corporate status quo controlling the world's food. For this reason, thus far, there has been little official leadership in the face of the crisis. Nor has there been any informed public debate about the real reasons the numbers of hungry people are growing, or what we can do about it. The future of our food—and fuel—systems are being decided de facto by unregulated global markets, financial speculators, and global monopolies."

But certain people would rather attack those who do actually flag up and campaign against such things and who desire transparency, democracy and the proper accountability of institutions that supposedly exist to protect the public interest. What we get instead is prominent figures decrying these campaigners as 'murderers', 'elitists' and regressive authoritarian 'types' and ludicrously comparing their actions with authoritarian regimes and mass death that occurred under such systems.

Anthony Trewavas:

"Most objectors in this area have a political programme not a scientific one but they like to bend science to their own political point of view. Science is by its nature not politics or political propaganda or anything like it. It deals with evidence not superstition, or political or social philosophies."

Trewavas conveniently sidesteps the underlying politics and commercial interests

underpinning GM and instead relies on a heavy dose of propaganda [by stating](#):

“It is an unfortunate situation that in our present world many environmentalist groups have become typically authoritarian in attitude. Greenpeace notably decides its opinions must prevail regardless of others, so it arrogates to itself the right to tear up and destroy things it doesn’t like. That is absolutely typical of people who are unable to convince others by debate and discussion and in the last century such attitudes, amplified obviously, ended up killing people that others did not like. But the same personality type the authoritarian.”

Such a simplistic analysis indicates that Trewavas is not a psychologist, a historian or a political scientist. He is a molecular biologist but appears to think his status qualifies him to have his ill-informed personal views taken as fact and promoted by the media. And he is not alone.

Kevin Folta, another molecular biologist (with close links to big agribusiness), argues that adopting GM would offer “plentiful and affordable food supply using responsible and sustainable agricultural practices.” Is he also an economist, a political scientist, a trade policy analyst and an ecologist? No amount of gene splicing or fine-sounding rhetoric can overcome the structural factors that lead to poverty and hunger. (Folta has also often spoken on health-related issues, which again are beyond the field of his expertise and has [got things wrong](#).)

Structural inequality, oil prices, debt repayment, trade policy, commodity speculation, land use (eg for biofuels), the destruction of indigenous food systems, access to land and credit, soil health, irrigation, etc, all feed into policies that determine plentiful, affordable food and sustainability. As the backbone of global food production, especially in the Global South, small farmers increasingly face marginalisation and oppression due to corporate seed monopolies, land speculation and takeovers, rigged trade that favours global agribusiness interests and commodity speculation: see [this](#) on food commodity speculation, [this](#) on the global food system and the dynamics that lead to hunger and inequality, [this](#) by the Oakland Institute on land grabs and the effects on small farmers and the following link on the impact of [international trade](#) rules.

So, what are we to conclude?

That certain figures within the pro-GM lobby are objective and independent? That they really do believe in choice and democracy, even when the evidence is clear that is being denied consumers and farmers through, for example, [unremitting regulatory fraud](#), [rigged markets](#), [secrecy](#), [manipulation of aid and trade](#) and [strings-attached loans](#)? That they know where the line is between science and lobbying, between science and propaganda?

Or, based on their associations and their silence on crucially important structural issues that create poverty, hunger and food deficit regions and their false claims and inflammatory remarks on other issues, are we to conclude that they are effectively doing the bidding of extremely powerful commercial interests?

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