

Who Will Bail Out Humanity If The GMO Evangelists Win?

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

The pro-GMO lobby likes to think it has the monopoly on truth. Anyone questioning its creed is attacked and smeared. GM Supporters claim to be big on science and peer review. While mouthing slogans about science and its pivotal role in steering the GM debate, they rely on unscientific tactics and [polemics](#) to promote their cause. They censor and distort scientific research and attack and smear scientists and others who criticise the pro-GMO establishment and the efficacy of or need for this technology. They also forward bogus claims based on the (inept – see [this](#)) studies they cite. (See [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#) to read about the points made here).

Rather than let science and rational discussion underpin the debate and attempt to use that to convince decision makers, the GM industry relies on expensive [lobbying campaigns](#) to attack transparency, resorts to [fakery](#), [bribery](#), [intimidation](#), [dirty tricks](#) and the [corrupting of public sector bodies](#) that in principle exist to uphold the public interest.

The fact remains that, in spite of these tactics and the funds at its disposal, the pro-GMO lobby has to date failed to make much headway in getting this technology accepted in most countries across the world. It has failed to make a convincing case for the need for GM, and its tactics have been shoddy and its reasoning bogus.

It says its opponents are anti-science who are bucking the supposed scientific consensus on GM and are preventing progress while overstating the risks involved. These claims have already been [exposed as fallacious](#), but a recent piece in the New York Times by an investment expert and a prominent scientific advisor with an interest in risk management provides some revealing insight. They deconstruct the myths that the industry relies on to promote GMOs and draw parallels with the financial collapse that led to the current ongoing economic crisis.

[Mark Spitznagel and Professor Nassim Taleb](#) argue that prior to the economic crisis that started in 2007, they believed that the financial system was fragile and unsustainable, contrary to the near ubiquitous analyses at the time. Most people held that the financial system could not fail because it was underpinned by expert analyses and the latest technology, leading to greater sophisticated economic insight.

However, Spitznagel and Taleb perceived the effect from rare but consequential events had been increasing and almost no one was paying attention to the greater risks involved due to the increasing complexity of the system. As the money rolled in and the rich got richer, people were ignoring or downplaying the risks.

At the time, the two authors were attacked for being ‘against science’. Their adversaries

invoked consensus among economists in favour of the prevailing methods. They also encountered the belief that 'more technology is invariably better'. They were told that had ideas such as theirs prevailed in the past, they would have hindered risk-taking. Moreover, toxic financial exposures were deemed to be 'safe', according to primitive risk models.

Spitznagel and Taleb also noted that the financial system kept relying on 'predictions', not noticing that the past track record of predictions by central bankers and economists had often been way off the mark. The entire economic system rested on these flimsy predictions.

They were repeatedly told that there was evidence that the system was stable, based on the notion that mistakes absence of evidence for evidence of absence, but they argued that for the financial system to be viable, the solution is for it to resemble the restaurant business: decentralised, with mistakes that stay local and that cannot bring down the entire apparatus.

Similar arguments and attacks on its critics are forwarded by the pro-GMO lobby. There is a tendency to label anyone who opposes GM as [anti-science and Luddite](#), not least because they are arguing against a supposed 'scientific consensus'. This so-called 'consensus' is [nothing but a fiction](#) of the collective imagination of the pro-GMO lobby. At any rate, had science operated solely by consensus, Spitznagel and Taleb argue that we would still be stuck in the Middle Ages: scientific consensus is used in telling us what theory is wrong but cannot determine what is right; nor can it apply to risk management, they argue, which requires much greater scrutiny.

They go on to state that most technologies fail in the long run, and the first rule of risk-taking is to not cross the street blindfolded - which is what the GMO lobby would like us all to do given that there are flaws and serious risks (see [this](#) and [this](#)) associated with this technology and that the [arguments promoting it](#) are bogus. Furthermore, the [processes involved in getting it onto the commercial market](#) were fraudulent, and there has not been a single independent long-term epidemiological study on GMOs.

Spitznagel and Taleb state that the 'technological salvation' argument they faced in finance is also present with GMOs: that this technology is needed to 'feed the world' or to 'save dying children' with GM fortified rice (when an argument cannot be won, the pro-GMO lobby resorts to [emotional blackmail](#)).

They assert that the premise behind GM rice is flawed because, in a complex system, we do not know the causal chain and it is better to solve a problem by the simplest method, not least one that is unlikely to cause a bigger problem. (Note: The arguments in favour of Golden Rice are flawed on various levels and could indeed lead to greater problems: see [this](#) and [this](#).)

In a more general sense, Spitznagel and Taleb see the same trend with GM as they saw in the globalised financial system: all risks are systemic and affect the entire population and ecosystem. The risks associated with GMOs are more severe than those of finance, however. The impact can result in complex and unpredictable changes in human health and the environment, while the methods of risk management - unlike finance, where some effort was made - are less than primitive.

Once the food system is contaminated by GMOs, there may be no going back. The GMO

industry is carrying out a massive unscientific (despite what it would like us to believe) experiment using people as human guinea pigs to rake in massive profits. Fuelled by the same profit motive (poorly hidden behind the [mask of humanitarian intent](#)), those behind the GM project are just as (even more) arrogant and reckless as were (and are) their deregulating neoliberal evangelist bedfellows in the finance sector.

Given the [political connections](#) of the GM industry and the active support it is receiving from governments and institutions across the world, it is being propped up regardless of its impacts on health, the environment and the livelihoods of small farmers – who already feed most of the world, despite the [marginalisation](#) they experience.

The pro-GMO lobby tries to focus the debate on ‘the science’ surrounding this technology because once the argument is broadened to include the politics of GM and the wider social implications and impacts, the discussion takes it onto ground that it is unable or unwilling to engage on (for example, see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)). But even when confining ourselves to the science of GM, its supporters still fail to provide a convincing case for GM.

Just like with the mega banks and the swindlers behind them, we are witnessing another systemic and politically well-connected, corrupt enterprise that is ‘too big to fail’. Spitznagel and Taleb are right to ask: who will be there to bail out humanity once it does fail?

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