

GMO “Collateral Damage”: Food Soaked With Toxicity

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#)

While watching Gary Null’s documentary ‘GMOs Ticking Time Bomb’, I was reminded of a run-in that I had with a transnational agribusiness concern in India a couple of years back. It sent a popular Indian newspaper a three page letter complaining about an article that I had written and which had appeared as the main piece on the edit page the day before. Claiming the article had done them ‘a lot of damage’ (as if the company itself had not been the master of self-inflicted damage due to its own criminal practices over the decades!), I in turn responded to them with a four page letter.

The company had wasted little time in going through the points I had made in the piece by contacting the editor and emailing me ‘telling’ me to phone a certain number so I could discuss the article with them. Arrogance comes naturally to certain corporations.

I had described in the original article how the company in question had in the past been responsible for manufacturing polychlorinated biphenols that cause cancer, dioxins that lead to chloracne, GM bovine growth hormone that produces mastitis in cattle and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) containing insect toxins, including GM corn, GM soya and Bt cotton, which are strongly associated with a range of health hazards. I further noted that it had also been involved in producing Agent Orange that the US dropped on Vietnam to destroy jungle and consequently led to mass death, disease and deformities. In June 2001, adding insult to injury, the company was accused by farmers in Vietnam’s Ninh Thuan province of pressuring them to use genetically modified seeds that resulted in corn and maize crop failures and economic ruin. One other point that I had mentioned was that the corporation had bribed scores of government officials in Asia to have its Bt cotton released without an environmental risk assessment.

I had also stated in the piece that the Navdanya organisation in India had found Bt-cotton had significantly reduced vital soil enzymes and bacteria, so much so that within a decade of planting GM cotton, or any GM crop with Bt genes, the destruction of soil organisms could be complete, resulting in dead soil unable to produce food.

The two representatives from the company’s offices in India who complained about the article attacked it on a number of points. In the piece, I had referred to a certain pesticide produced by it as being ‘controversial’. I was informed that it has been proved to be completely safe. I was also informed that many of the claims pertaining to the health hazards concerning their other products had not been conclusively proven. Of course, little was said about the ‘irony’ of now trying to bring GMOs to Vietnam, a country still reeling

from the health effects of the company's last poisonous incursion via Agent Orange.

How does this company deem something to be safe? It says it is; therefore it is. And because it has infiltrated the US government, not least the Food and Drug Administration, what it says in terms of food policy, goes. But, of course, it can always refer to its own 'research' to back up its claims!

The second most laughable part of the three page letter sent to the newspaper was the criticism of Navdanya's research which claimed that Bt-cotton destroys soil organisms. The company was quick to jump on this research for being methodologically unsound. This from a company with a track record of dubious research. And I am being extremely benign by using the word 'dubious'.

In 'GMOs Ticking Time Bomb', Rima E Laibow, Medical Director of Natural Solutions Foundation, argues that every single independent study conducted on the impact of GMOs shows they damage organs and cause infertility, immune system failure, holes in the GI tract and multiple system failure when eaten. She argues that they cause a variety of changes, some of which we can't even guess at as new proteins are coded due to altered DNA - some which we've never seen before. Laibow concludes we are playing with genetic fire.

Gilles-Eric Seralini, professor of molecular biology at the University of Caen in France, says it is absurd that only three months of testing allowed GM corn to be approved in over a dozen nations. Upon reviewing the raw 'research' data of the agribusiness that produced the GM corn, he and his team found, among other problems, liver damage and physiological changes into a pre-diabetic condition among the rats which had eaten it. And that's just from three months of eating such food!

But who cares about science when strong arm tactics suffice? With threats of lawsuits and UK government pressure, top research scientist Dr Arpad Pusztai was effectively silenced over his research and comments concerning the dangers of GM food. He was fired from his job and a campaign was set in motion to destroy his reputation in order to protect the reputation of biotechnology. In a similar vein, a WikiLeaks cable highlighted how GMOs were being forced into European nations by the US ambassador to France who plotted with other US officials to create a 'retaliatory target list' of anyone who tried to regulate GMOs.

The outcome in India has been deals between the Indian government and the US tied to opening up the agriculture sector to western agribusiness. As a result, 250,000 heavily indebted farmers have committed suicide, mainly in the cotton belt, where farmers planted GM cotton and could not afford the input overheads for this water-intensive, chemical-intensive crop, which has to be bought annually thanks to the 'wonders' of profiteering terminator seed technology.

What next? Getting the sterile/infertility inducing epicyste gene (which powerful agribusiness concerns now own) into foodstuffs in India in order to implement population control through the back door?

And all of this because the US Government will not back away from a strategy it adopted some years ago. Jeffrey M Smith, Executive Director for the Institute for Responsible Technology notes that US fast tracked the GM industry because it thought it would increase exports and dominate world supply. The opposite happened: Russia, China and the EU were not the pushovers US agribusiness had hoped they would be. So the US government spent three to five billion dollars a year to prop up the prices of a product no one wanted. Instead of admitting it was a failure, the US has been trying to open up markets by bullying foreign governments. Smith rightly says that the subsidy is stealing money away from other investing in organic agriculture.

I say the second most laughable part of the letter from the company that complained to the newspaper was the bit about attacking Navdanya's research. The top prize for laughter went to it informing me that it had paid the fines resulting from the illegal cases pertaining to bribery in Asia. Such high mindedness, such morality, such a belief in the rule of law. Well done!

This from a company that has in the past told us that certain of its products were completely safe but was then convicted of poisoning the people in the town next to its factory in the US.

Under capitalism, the aim of companies is to make money, to maximise profit for shareholders. According to Professor Colin Campbell of Cornell University, any safety requirements are secondary concerns, if they are concerns at all. Therefore, in a democratic society, we expect the state to take care of these concerns on our behalf. But how can it when the US government, especially over the past two decades, has become a subsidiary of agribusiness corporations by acting on their behalf? In the US, via its control of the FDA and other federal regulatory agencies, agribusiness is effectively in charge, telling the public that their GMOs are safe.

But who in the world can believe this from certain players with a track records of deceit and criminality? Who can believe this when the revolving door between government bodies and top corporate officials leads to policy being formed on behalf of corporate self interest?

These are not just questions that are pertinent to the good people of the US. Given the power and reach of Bayer, Du Pont, Syngenta, Dow Chemicals and Monsanto via their proxy, the US government, it is just as pertinent to people elsewhere. 250,000 Indian farmers and their families have already found this out to their cost. While the debate in India concerning GM food rages on, the government has so far not let GM foods into the market. Let's hope for the sake of the population at large, it never will. Food security and sovereignty in places like India are not reliant on GM foods. Quite the opposite in fact (see <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/07/20117810358528978.html>)

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About the author:

Colin Todhunter is an extensively published independent writer and former social policy researcher. Originally from the UK, he has spent many years in India. His website is www.colintodhunter.com
https://twitter.com/colin_todhunter

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