

GMO Propaganda and Neoliberalism vs Localisation and Agroecology

Approaching Development

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Region: [Asia](#), [Europe](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#), [Law and Justice](#)

What people communicate is a matter of choice. But what can be more revealing are the issues they choose to avoid. There are certain prominent pro-GMO activists who describe themselves as 'science communicators'. They hit out at those who question their views or who have valid criticisms of GM technology and then play the role of persecuted victim, believing that, as the self-appointed arbiters of righteousness, they are beyond reproach, although given their [duplicity](#) nothing could be further from the truth.

Instead of being open to questioning, they attempt to close down debate to push a [flawed technology](#) they have a vested (financial-career) interest in, while all the time appealing to their self-perceived authority, usually based on holding a PhD in molecular biology or a related discipline.

They relentlessly promote GM and industrial agriculture and unjustifiably [cast critics as zealots](#) who are in cahoots with Greenpeace or some other group they have a built-in dislike of. And they cynically raise or lower the bar of 'credibility' by ad hominem and misrepresentation so that studies, writers and scientists who agree with them are commended while those who don't become subjected to [smear campaigns](#).

Often with [ties to](#) neoliberal think tanks, pro-GMO lobbyists call for more deregulation and criticise elected governments or regulatory bodies which try to protect the public interest, especially where genetic engineering and associated chemical inputs (for instance, glyphosate) are concerned. The same people push the bogus idea that only GM agriculture can feed the world, while seeking to discredit and marginalise alternative models like agroecology and ignoring the structural violence and injustices brought about by global agricapital interests (from whom they receive funding) which help determine Codex, World Bank, IMF and WTO policies. By remaining silent or demonstrating wilful ignorance about the [dynamics and injustices](#) of the political economy of food and agriculture, they tacitly approve of its consequences.

They also frame the GMO debate as pro-science/pro-GMO vs anti-science/anti-GMO: an industry-promoted false dichotomy that has sought to close down any wider discussion that may lead the focus to fall on transnational agribusiness interests and their role in determining an exploitative global food regime and how GM fits in with this.

This is how ideologues act; not how open discourse and science is carried out or 'communicated'.

Broadening the debate

A participant in any meaningful discussion about GM would soon appreciate that [ethical, political, environmental and sociological considerations](#) should determine the efficacy and relevance of this technology in conjunction with scientific considerations. Unfortunately, pro-GMO advocates want to depoliticise food and agriculture and focus on the 'science' of GM, yield-output reductionist notions of 'productivity' and little else, defining the 'problem' of food and agriculture solely as a narrow technocratic issue.

But to understand the global food regime, we must move beyond technology. Food and agriculture have become wedded to structures of power that have created food surplus and food deficit areas and which have restructured indigenous agriculture across the world and tied it to an international system of trade based on export-oriented mono-cropping, commodity production for a manipulated and volatile international market and indebtedness to global financial institutions.

More specifically, there are the deleterious impacts of [the nexus between](#) sovereign debt repayment and the 'structural adjustment' of regional agriculture; [spiralling input costs](#) for farmers who become dependent on proprietary seeds and technologies; [ecocide, genocide and](#) the destruction of food self-sufficiency; [the fuelling of barbaric, industrial-scale death](#) via animal-based (meat) agriculture and the colonisation of land to facilitate it; US/EU subsidies which mean farmers in developing countries cannot achieve prices to cover their costs of production; and degraded soils, polluted oceans and rising rates of illness, etc.

If any one country epitomises much of what is wrong with the global food regime, it is Argentina, where in an [October 26th 2018 article](#) ('Soy destruction in Argentina leads straight to our dinner plates') The Guardian newspaper's analysis of (GM) soy cultivation highlighted many of the issues set out above.

Whether the impacts of the global food regime result from World Bank/IMF directives and geopolitical lending strategies, [neoliberal plunder](#) 'ease-of-doing-business' ideology, undemocratic corporate-written trade deals or WTO rules, we are seeing the negative impacts on indigenous systems of food and agriculture across the world, not least in India, where a million farmers intend to [march to Delhi](#) and the national parliament between 28 and 30 November.

India's manufactured ongoing [agrarian crisis](#) is adversely affecting the bulk of the country's 840 million rural dwellers. And all for what? To run down and displace the existing system of peasant-farmer-based production with a discredited, ecologically unsustainable (GMO) model run along neoliberal 'free' market lines by global agribusiness, a model which is only profitable because it passes on its [massive health, environmental and social costs](#) to the public.

Neoliberal dogma

Tim Worstall of the Adam Smith Institute in London [says](#) of India's agrarian crisis that Indian farmers should be left to go bust because they are uncompetitive and relatively unproductive. But even where farmers in India produce world record yields, they are still heavily indebted. So why can't they compete?

Putting the huge external costs of the model of industrial agriculture which Worstall compares Indian agriculture to aside (which he conveniently ignores), the issue is clear: a heavily subsidised US/EU agriculture depresses prices for Indian farmers both at home and on the international market.

Policy analyst Devinder Sharma says that [subsidies provided](#) to US wheat and rice farmers are more than the market worth of these two crops. He also notes that, per day, each cow in Europe receives a subsidy worth more than an Indian farmer's daily income. He [suggests](#): let the US and EU do away with subsidies, relieving taxpayers of such a costly burden and let Indian farmers compete properly; then see that it is the Indian farmer who produces the cheapest food; and then imagine US consumers benefitting from this cheap food.

That is the 'free' market which could exist. A fair one not distorted by subsidies. Not the type of market that currently exists and which is 'free' only within the ideological parameters set by Worstall and others who promote it.

Proponents of the 'free' market and GMOs are big on 'choice': letting 'the market', the consumer or the farmer decide, without anyone imposing their agenda. This is little more than rhetoric which [fails to stand up](#) to scrutiny, given the strategically embedded influence of agri-capital over policy makers. If anything encapsulates the nonsense and hypocrisy surrounding this notion of choice are reports about Monsanto and its cynical manipulation of agriculture in Punjab.

According to an [article](#) in Delhi's Sunday Guardian in late 2017 ('Monsanto's profits, not Diwali, creating smoke in Delhi'), India's surplus food grain supply is an uncomfortable fact for the pro-GMO lobby. The piece notes that in 2012 the then Punjab Chief Minister asked Monsanto to set up a research centre for creating maize and, due to fears over water shortages, announced plans to reduce the area under rice cultivation to around 45% to grow maize. Fear-mongering about rice cultivation was reaching fever pitch, stoked by an advertisement campaign from a group of scientists who appealed 'Reduce the area under rice, save water, save Punjab'.

Conveniently, Monsanto (now Bayer) offers its GM maize as a solution that will increase the level of subsoil water, although that corporation's inputs and Green Revolution practices led to problems in Punjab and elsewhere in the first place. For instance, fertilisers and pesticides have accumulated in the ground water (causing massive health issues) and their use has also led to poor water retention in soil, leading farmers to pump excessive amounts of ground water.

Punjab's plan to reduce the area under rice cultivation (a staple food for large sections of the Indian population) with what will most likely be GM animal feed is part of a cynical tactic. Of course, any resulting gap between supply of and demand for food in India will be conveniently filled via global agribusiness and an influx of GMO produce from abroad or by growing it in India (have no doubt, [the push is on](#) for that too).

It is reminiscent of unscrupulous attempts to [undermine India's edible oils sector](#) in the late 1990s and current attempts to [break traditional cotton cultivation pathways](#) in India to help usher in herbicide-tolerant seeds (which have now 'miraculously' appeared on the market – illegally). The ability of hugely powerful corporations to flex their financial muscle and exert their considerable political clout to manufacture 'choice' and manipulate policies is the reality of neoliberal capitalism.

Those pro-GMO ‘science communicators’ are silent on such matters and, as with their fellow neoliberal ideologues, have nothing of any substance to say on these types of ‘market-distorting’ power relations, which make a mockery of their ‘free’ choice and ‘free’ market creed.

Indeed, a [recent report](#) in The Guardian indicates that neoliberal ‘austerity’ in the UK has had little to do with economics, having [failed in its objective](#) of reducing the national debt, and much to do with social engineering. But this is the ideological basis of modern neoliberal capitalism: dogma masquerading as economics to help justify the engineering of the world in the image of undemocratic, unaccountable corporations.

Agroecology and food sovereignty

The industrial agriculture that Worstall compares Indian farmers’ productivity with is outperformed by smallholder-based agriculture in terms of, for example, [diversity of food output, nutrition per acre and efficient water use](#). Imagine what could be achieved on a level playing field whereby smallholder farming receives the type of funding and political commitment currently given to industrial agriculture.

In fact, we do not have to imagine; in places where agroecology has been scaled up, we are beginning [to see](#) the benefits. The principles of agroecology include self-reliance, localisation and food sovereignty. This type of agriculture does not rely on top-down corporate ‘science’, corporate owned or controlled seeds or proprietary inputs. It is [potentially more](#) climate resilient, labour intensive (job creating), more profitable for farmers and can contribute to soil quality and nutrient-enhanced/diverse diets. Moreover, it could help reinvigorate rural India and its villages.

When the British controlled India, they set about breaking the self-reliance of the Indian village. In a [2009 article](#) by Bhavdeep Kang (‘Can the Indian farmer withstand predatory international giants?’), it is stated:

“The British Raj initiated the destruction of the village communities, famously described by Lord Metcalfe as ‘little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves.’ India’s ability to endure, he wrote, derived from these village communities: ‘They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down but the village community remains the same. It is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence.’”

Metcalfe said this in 1830. However, since independence from the British, India’s rulers have further established ‘village India’s’ dependency on central government. And now a potential death knell for rural India is underway as India’s ruling elite, exhibiting a severe bout of ‘Stockholm syndrome’, [sells out the nation](#) to not only Western agribusiness but also to US finance and intelligence interests.

Whether it concerns India or elsewhere, to see the advantages of agroecology, there are those economists, political leaders and ‘science communicators’ who must remove the self-imposed blinkers. This would involve shifting their priorities away from promoting career-building technologies and facilitating neoliberal capitalism towards working for [justice, equality, peace and genuine grass-root food sovereignty](#).

To do that, though, such figures would first have to begin to bite the hand that feeds them.

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Colin Todhunter is a frequent contributor to Asia-Pacific Research.



Seeds of Destruction: Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation

Author Name: F. William Engdahl

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Pages: 341 pages with complete index

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Special Price: \$18.00

This skilfully researched book focuses on how a small socio-political American elite seeks to establish control over the very basis of human survival: the provision of our daily bread. "Control the food and you control the people."

This is no ordinary book about the perils of GMO. Engdahl takes the reader inside the corridors of power, into the backrooms of the science labs, behind closed doors in the corporate boardrooms.

The author cogently reveals a diabolical world of profit-driven political intrigue, government corruption and coercion, where genetic manipulation and the patenting of life forms are used to gain worldwide control over food production. If the book often reads as a crime story, that should come as no surprise. For that is what it is.

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