

Forcing Farmers to Plant Genetically Modified Seeds: Colombians Revolt Against Seed Control and Agricultural Tyranny

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Early in September, 2013, the Colombian government was forced to partially concede to the demands of a nationwide general strike instigated by farmers of the largely agrarian nation.

Will Colombia's farmers defeat the [economic hitmen](#) of the agricultural industry?

Early in September, 2013, the Colombian government was forced to partially concede to the demands of a nationwide general strike instigated by farmers of the largely agrarian nation. The three week long protests and blockades that shut down much of the nation were supported by thousands of miners, truckers, students, bus drivers, and Colombian citizens, blocking roads and [clashing with police](#).

Close to 650 arrests were made, 485 injuries were reported, 12 people killed, and over 600 cases of human rights violations reported. Coverage of the [nationwide protests](#) feature rural peoples and urban demonstrators in the typical contest against body-armor clad, state riot police armed with gas, rubber bullets, flash-bang grenades and batons, beating people and dispersing women and children in clouds of smoke.

The popular uprising was the result of poor economic conditions coinciding with rising anger over agricultural law 9.70, passed in 2010, which officially made it illegal to share, trade, or sell [native seeds](#) amongst farmers, effectively criminalizing generations long traditions of local and small scale agriculture. A documentary film by [Victoria Salano](#) featuring footage of the destruction of stocks of native seeds by the government helped to inform the public and to catalyze the movement to suspend law 9.70.

"There have to be controls which govern our food sovereignty," states Vélez. "We should control which seeds are introduced to the country and can harm local ones. We shouldn't be persecuting the seeds which are native to our soil." – German Alonso Vélez

The current system, in place for many years now, already forces farmers to annually purchase seed that is certified by the country's agricultural institution, rather than allowing them to plant native seed, presenting a severe financial burden to small-scale cultivators. Law 9.70, however, expanded this tyranny by criminalizing the sharing and trading of native seeds, offering prison terms for this customary practice. This seems to have been the last straw for struggling farmers who are appalled to see their heritage criminalized and eradicated by their government working on behalf of [international corporate interests](#).

The seed control policies are forcing farmers to plant genetically modified and patented seed, while ensuring dependence on foreign seed imports and imported [pesticides](#), fertilizers and other chemicals. For a nation that has largely survived until now by using native seed, the lack of diversity in imported varieties means that hundreds of years of local agricultural development is being eradicated in exchange for an unaffordable farming system based on genetically modified products seen by many as having severe and wholly yet unknown health risks.

The reaction by such a large segment of the public is reflective of the concern over a looming [food crisis](#), as well as growing public awareness of the practices of the monopolies governing Colombia's food system. More people now understand the root cause of the issue, international free-trade agreements and pressure from agro-chemical giants, such as [Monsanto](#), which put international corporations in dominion over small farmers by forcing them to buy imported products and services that have never before been needed. It is a usurpation of control over the most important segment of the economy, food.

"It's no longer viable for a dairy farm to make ends meet with three cows. Unless there are profound structural changes to current development models, we will be totally dependent on monopolies for food." – German Alonso Vélez

Implementation of seed control was described by Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos as 'having Colombia tuned up to international reality.' This statement is, of course, completely true. The trending international reality is exactly this, trojan horse conquest of national food sovereignty by means of international corporate/government treaties and agreements sponsored by international governing bodies and the bottomless coiffeurs of the companies that benefit directly from such trade agreements.

The shift to this international model of farming simply does not make economic or common sense for the people of most nations. Author and self-proclaimed 'economic hitman' [John Perkins](#) wrote about this type of imperial foreign occupation by corporate influence in his critical book, '[Confessions of an Economic Hitman](#).' It is the newest means of international conquest.

"If government controls the use of seeds, it controls what is planted, and what we end up eating." – Richard Emblem

The international drive toward the monopolization of seed, the global reduction of seed diversity, and the abolishment of small scale farming is being seen all over the world. Earlier this year the European Union presented the 'Plant Reproductive Material Law' which originally aimed to limit the types of seeds an individual can plant in their own backyard gardens to those approved by a bureaucratic agency. In the United States, [Roundup Ready](#) alfalfa is 'accidentally' contaminating non-gmo acreage at such a pace that non-gmo alfalfa may soon become a thing of the past. Farmers are being driven out of business by the legal teams of large corporations, and local municipalities and homeowner's associations are fining homeowners for their gardens, and in some shocking cases, local farms are being raided by SWAT teams for code violations and unsubstantiated rumors.

The war against sovereign food is happening right now, and the developments in Colombia serve as another example of the unnecessary and unfair stresses that the international

corporate model of agricultural can put on a nation, it's farmers and it's economy. In opposition to this, worldwide there are campaigns to educate farmers about the realities of [gmo-agriculture](#) and also to inform the public of the other side of the issue which points to unknown and suspected health risks of consuming gmo foods, their dependence on [toxic](#) pesticides and herbicides, the high costs of buying seed each year, the loss of diversity.

"By privatizing our seeds we began eroding our agricultural autonomy." - German Alonso Vélez

Most people simply don't yet understand how important it is to retain food sovereignty, but this recent case from Colombia gives us insight how quickly this issue can reach critical mass. Some important conclusions that we can draw from these recent events in Colombia are:

- Food is the most important and unifying social cause, and the primary issue to set off [civil unrest](#).
- National labor strikes are more effective than protest at forcing a dialogue on popular issues.
- Monsanto and the bio-tech giants are not invincible, and global momentum is gaining in opposition to this new model of international genetically modified and chemically dependent agriculture.
- The 'free-trade' model of achieving international conformity in agriculture is a new form of colonialism and empire building. It criminalizes traditional and everyday activities in order to render whole nations dependent on international imports.
- Grass roots media and documentary films are an exceptional means of educating people and exposing the corruption and insanity of this model of agriculture.

The Colombian government's concession to suspend law 9.70 and release all of those detained in the protests is an important sign that people do still have a voice. This story is far from over and time alone will tell how this plays out, as it is unlikely that the corporations and nations which have standing agreements with Colombia will permit the Colombians to easily renege on any treaties.

"If Colombia is not careful in protecting its traditional farming methods, it could become 100 percent dependent on foreign grown foods, especially GMOs."
- German Alonso Vélez

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