

Corporate Greed and Disregard for Food Safety and Biodiversity: Food Sovereignty Should Not be Handed Over to the GMO Biotech Conglomerates

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

Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#)

After a four-year legislative battle, the European parliament has granted member states the ability to decide for themselves whether or not they want to allow crops of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on their soil. Writing in The Parliament Magazine, Member of the European Parliament Marc Tarabella notes that the wishes of several pro-GMO lobbies, led by several multinationals and Britain, did not prevail [1].

A legal basis was obtained for allowing member states to ban the implementation of GMO crops and an extension of the list of motives for this. The goal to avoid contamination of traditional crops by GMO crops was also strengthened.

In 2010, a Eurostat study found that 59 per cent of Europeans think GMOs are dangerous [2]. It is the responsibility of the European Food Safety Authority to therefore address such concerns and properly assess the dangers of GMOs. However, as Tarabella notes, the EFSA's track record is worrying. Several former members of food-processing industry lobbies have been nominated as EFSA officials.

Between 1998 and 2010, out of the 125 import authorisation requests submitted to the commission, other than six applications that were withdrawn by manufacturers themselves, none were denied. Tarabella states that as the EFSA is responsible for the food safety of half a billion citizens, it is perfectly within our rights to expect it to be neutral, upright and trustworthy. The EFSA is though riddled with conflicts of interest [3].

He argues that studies on GMOs have been left in the hands of multinationals for too long and writes that these companies are merely motivated by greed and the promotion of single-crop farming, with a complete disregard for food safety and biodiversity.

What Europe needs is neutral and transparent research. The evidence shows we have anything but [4].

A new high level report on GMOs in India

On the back of India sanctioning the open-field trials of GM crops, similar concerns are being echoed there too. The biotech regulator, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee, has approved field trials of 13 GM crops, including those of mustard, cotton, brinjal, rice and chickpea.

An Indian parliamentary committee and the technical committee of India's Supreme Court has already stressed the need for caution and has recommended bans on GM field trials

until stronger regulatory controls can be put in place. Now another high level committee chaired by T.S.R. Subramanian, a former cabinet secretary of India, has drawn similar conclusions [5].

T S R Subramanian has warned that the government should exercise caution and seek:

“... greater assurance (given that the) potential for medium/long-term adverse affects through unprepared introduction of Genetically Modified (GM) food crops.... I am not against GM crops but we need to take appropriate caution. All I am saying is that don't take chances that you cannot undo... Keep your eyes open and check carefully the possible consequences (of field trials) on our biodiversity. European countries are not allowing field trials and they are not idiots.”

The report states:

“The potential consequences of mindless use of science and technology could possibly be illustrated by referring to the potential for medium/long-term adverse effects through unprepared introduction of Genetically Modified food crops... the average Indian farm is of very small size (which could lead to severe adverse impact on biodiversity through gene-flow)... there are no independent expert agencies in the country.”

Through a series of recommendations, the Committee seeks to improve rather than merely maintain the environmental standards and biological assets of the country.

The Committee's report comes at an apt time given that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is pitching a Make in India campaign that wants to make India a potential investment destination for GM crops.

The Make in India campaign's website states that India has the potential to become a major producer of transgenic rice and several genetically modified or engineered vegetables. As reported in Business Standard [6], the website also states GM food crops are an investment opportunity for foreign players as they will offer “new business opportunities” in the country. It states that “Hybrid seeds, including GM seeds, represent new business opportunities in India based on yield improvement.”

Business Standard notes that this is the first time the National Democratic Alliance government has made public its stance on allowing field trials for GM food crops.

It is revealing that Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar last week stated in parliament:

“The Union government is of the view that research in GM and confined field trials for generating bio-safety data with all due precautions should be allowed to continue in the national interest.”

The implication is that GMOs are in the ‘national interest’. They are clearly not. Quite the opposite in fact (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

Does this also mean that those who are legitimately resisting the introduction of GMO's are thus working against the 'national interest'? This is not merely implied by officialdom but has been stated (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

Before coming to power, certain commentators feared Modi would be beholden to foreign interests [7]. India can feed itself without GMOs but the Make in India campaign appears to include handing over food sovereignty to foreign corporations and is itself based on a fallacious and increasingly outdated notion of 'development' and 'growth' [8].

From India to Europe, there is a drive to push GMOs into countries at all (health, environmental and social) costs. This is in part being driven by profit-hungry agritech corporations. As with the big-dam, water intensive, oil-dependent, dollar boosting, debt-inducing, chemical-industrial model of agriculture we have seen over the last 50 years or so, the GM version is also a tool to further subjugate nations to the hegemonic needs of the US [9,10].

Notes

- 1] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/eu-needs-stronger-food-safety-authority>
- 2] http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_341_en.pdf
- 3] <http://corporateeurope.org/efsa/2013/10/unhappy-meal-european-food-safety--authoritys-independence-problem>
- 4] <http://gmwatch.org/index.php/news/archive/2014/15519-the-glyphosate-toxicity-studies--you-re-not-allowed-to-see>
- 5] <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/high-level-committee-urges-caution-on-genetically--modified-food-crops/article6648794.ece>
- 6] http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/modis-make-in-india-bats-for--gm-food-crops-114112800933_1.html
- 7] <https://www.facebook.com/notes/shelley-kasli/mechanics-of-narendra-modis-pr-agency--apco-worldwide-orchestrating-our-future/500231493335095>
- 8] <http://rinf.com/alt-news/editorials/menace-menu-globalization-servitude/>
- 9] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/americas-political-subjugation-of-india-rests-on--monsantos-overriding-control-of-agriculture/5411336>
- 10] <http://www.prosper.org.au/2014/10/10/think-tank-times/>

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