

Corporate Power Reality Check: Organic Vs Industrial Chemical-Dependent Agriculture

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#), [Global Economy](#)

What follows is a summary of [this article](#), 'A System of Food Production for Human Need, Not Corporate Greed', and is a preamble to something that was recently forwarded to me by Emeritus Professor Stuart B. Hill, Foundation Chair of Social Ecology, School of Education, Western Sydney University.

In 2007, as part of a requested submission to the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), Professor Hill submitted a very useful and concise table comparing the philosophies and practices of organic-based agriculture (including agroecology) and chemical-intensive, industrialised agriculture.

I've taken the time to present Prof. Hill's work here because, although it is 10 years old, it is a valuable reminder of the differences between the two models and why the world must step off the chemical treadmill and move towards a more organic-based system of farming.

Introduction

There has been an adverse trend in the food and agriculture sector in recent times with the control of seeds and chemical inputs being consolidated through [various proposed mergers](#). Over the past couple of decades, there has already been a restriction of choice with the [squeezing out of competitors](#), resulting in [higher costs](#) for farmers, who are increasingly reliant on [corporate seeds \(and their chemical inputs\)](#).

Big agribusiness players like Monsanto rely on [massive taxpayer](#) handouts to keep their business models on track; highly profitable models that have immense [social, health and environmental costs](#) to be paid for by the public. Across the globe [healthy, sustainable agriculture](#) has been uprooted and transformed to suit the profit margins of transnational agribusiness concerns. The major players in the global agribusiness sector fuel a [geo-politicised](#), globalised system of food production that result in numerous negative outcomes for both farmers and consumers alike (listed [here](#): 4th paragraph from the end).

The extremely wealthy interests behind these corporations do their level best to displace or dismantle alternative models of production – whether agroecology, organic, public sector agriculture systems or anything that exists independently from them – and replace them with ones that serve their needs. Look no further than attempts attempts to [undermine indigenous edible oils processing](#) in India, for instance. Look no further than the 'mustard seed crisis' in India in 1998. Or look no further than how transnational biotech helped fuel and then benefit from the destruction of [Ethiopia's traditional agrarian economy](#).

Whether it's on the back of US-backed coups ([Ukraine](#)), military conflicts ([Iraq](#)), 'structural

adjustment' ([Africa](#)) or slanted trade deals ([India](#)), transnational agribusiness is driving a global agenda to suit its interests and eradicate impediments to profit.

Increasing profit and shareholder dividends are the bottom line. And it doesn't matter how much devastation ensues or how unsustainable their business model is, 'crisis management' and 'innovation' fuel the [corporate-controlled treadmill](#) they seek to impose.

Despite the promise of the Green Revolution, [hundreds of millions](#) still go to bed hungry, food has become [denutritified](#), functioning rural economies have been [destroyed](#), diseases have [spiked](#) in correlation with the increase in use of pesticides and GMOs, soil has been [eroded or degraded](#), diets are [less diverse](#), global food security has been [undermined](#) and access to food is [determined by](#) manipulated international markets and speculation – not supply and demand.

Food and agriculture have become wedded to power structures that have created food surplus and food deficit areas and 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 international financial institutions.

Ultimately, the problem is centred on a system of international capitalism that is driving a globalised model of [bad food and poor health](#) and the [destruction](#) of healthy, sustainable agriculture.

Organic & Conventional Agriculture Compared by Prof. Stuart B. Hill

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| Relationship with Nature (biodiversity, habitats, ecological processes etc) | To be respected, worked with (as whole, integrated & interrelated systems), & supported | Selection, control & ownership of 'parts' that are (primarily) regarded as being valuable economically |
| Primary Goals/Roles in Society (actual versus professed focus) | Nourishment & support of human wellbeing (& avoidance of toxic impacts) Restoration, build-up, conservation & maintenance (sustainability) of: agroecosystems (especially soil), rest of nature, gene-pool, & knowledge & skills of farmers - for present & future generations | Productivity/yieldProfit/money 'Political' power (local to global) Other professed goals invariably compromised by one or more of the above ones – hence the numerous impacts & disbenefits for people & environments |
| Other Priorities & Concerns | Intra- & trans-generational equity & social justiceMeaningful & fulfilling work & lifestyles | Growth Market share Control (much of this having [largely sub-conscious] psychological, compensatory & substitutive functions) |
| Primary Inputs | Knowledge (especially ecology) & skills (especially agroecosystem design and management)Diverse bio-ecological inputs, serving multiple beneficial roles & functions | Imported/purchased seed & stock (increasingly hybrid, from narrowing gene-pools & genetically engineered), synthetic fertilizers, pesticides (including herbicides & anti-microbials) & growth stimulants Technologies, & design & management to achieve control & maximise productivity |
| Technological Supports | Elegant, contextually & ecosystem-matched, supportive, human-scale appropriate technologies; used in support of primary goals & values: solar, renewable, repairable, improvable (etc)Designed & used to support & maintain wellbeing-enabling ecosystem processes Full range of alternative technologies available for when needed | Large, powerful, expensive, decontextual, fossil-fuel dependent, often disruptive & impacting technologiesDesigned to force change & control, without reference to their effects on benign ecosystem processes Partly (largely subconsciously) purchased & used for their compensatory (power symbolism), psychological roles Few alternatives when faced with failures |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Agroecosystem Design | Complex in bio-ecology, space & time: mixed farms, multi-species, multiple cropping & polyculture agroecosystems, with inclusion of concern for adjacent areas & non-commercial species | Bare-soil, row-crop monocultures & simple rotations, from a narrowing gene-pool |
| Pests (including weeds & diseases) | <p>Regarded first as indicators of agroecosystem maldesign & mismanagement (& therefore requiring response in these areas)</p> <p>Systems designed to be 'healthy' & pest-proof, with controls used as interim & emergency measures, & selected & used in ways that minimise negative impacts, as specific as possible & based on natural processes & materials (where possible produced on-farm or locally)</p> | Regarded as 'enemies' to be eliminated & controlled, economically, with purchased synthetic so-called pesticides (actually 'biocides', because of their innate non-specificity: cannot design specific poisons against economic entities) – increasingly from companies that also supply the seed(as a 'package', eg, glyphosate-resistant seed) |
| Sustainability | Over time, becoming increasingly ecologically sustainable, with gains & improvements in knowledge & skills, & in quality of the resource base & enablement of ecosystem functioning | Over time becoming increasingly unsustainable, with declining quality of resource base, including losses of biodiversity & gene-pool, soil fertility & structure, increases in pests, weeds & diseases (particularly those resistant to pesticides, herbicides & antibiotics) & increasing dependence on inputs that are non-renewable & that have harmful side-effects & other negative characteristics |
| Future Prospects | Will spread & improve over time in effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability & resilience, & in achieving its prioritised goals & support of our 'higher' valuesCapable of being supportive of our ongoing psychosocial evolution as a species | Will recede & decline over time & become less effective, less efficient, & more unsustainable and vulnerable, as its disbenefits are internalised & its resource base is used up (& becomes more & more expensive), & as our species evolves psychosocially towards lifestyles & institutions based on 'higher' values (than monetary ones), and so increasingly rejects such narrowly conceived approaches |

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