GMOs, Global Agribusiness and the Destruction of Choice

By Colin Todhunter
Global Research, January 08, 2018

Theme: Biotechnology and GMO, Law and Justice, Poverty & Social Inequality

One of the myths perpetuated by the pro-GMO (genetically modified organisms) lobby is that critics of GMOs in agriculture are denying choice to farmers and have an ideological agenda. The narrative is that farmers should have access to a range of tools and technologies, including GM crops.

Before addressing this issue, we should remind ourselves that GMOs have been illegitimately placed on the commercial market due to the bypassing of regulations. Steven Druker's book Altered Genes, Twisted Truths (2015) indicates that the commercialisation of GM food in the US was based on a massive fraud. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) files revealed that GM foods first achieved commercialisation in 1992 but only because the FDA covered up the extensive warnings of its own scientists about their dangers, lied about the facts and then violated federal food safety law by permitting GM food to be marketed without having been proven safe through standard testing.

Source: Organic Consumers Association

If the FDA had heeded its own experts' advice and publicly acknowledged their warnings that GM foods entailed higher risks than their conventional counterparts, Druker says that the GM food venture would have imploded and never gained traction anywhere.

It is highly convenient for the pro-GMO lobby to talk about choice while ignoring such a massive subversion of democratic procedures and processes which could (and arguably is) changing the genetic core of the world's food.

The denial of choice is a very important accusation. But just what is it that critics are said to be denying farmers? The pro-GMO lobby say that GM crops can increase yields, reduce the use of agrochemicals and are required if we are to feed the world. To date, however, the track record of GMOs is unimpressive.

If we turn to India, we can now see that Bt cotton has largely been a failure. GM cotton has hardly been a success elsewhere either. Although critics are blamed for Golden Rice not being on the market, again the reality is that after two decades problems remain with the technology.

A largely non-GMO Europe tends to outperform the US, which largely relies on GM crops. In general, "GM crops have not consistently increased yields or farmer incomes, or reduced

pesticide use in North America or in the Global South (Benbrook, 2012; Gurian-Sherman, 2009)" (from the report 'Persistent narratives, persistent failure').

GM agriculture is not 'feeding the world', nor has it been designed to do so. The choice for farmers between a technology based on broken promises (as further outlined in this NYT piece) and conventional non-GMO agriculture is no choice at all.

> "Currently available GM crops would not lead to major yield gains in Europe," says Matin Qaim, a researcher at Georg-August-University of Göttingen, Germany.

He adds that as far as herbicide-resistant crops in general are concerned:

> "I don't consider this to be the miracle type of technology that we couldn't live without" (quoted in another New York Times article, Doubts about the promised bounty of GM crops.)

A choice between proven non-GMO agriculture and a failing or less effective GMO model (with all the serious health, environmental and social impacts) is nothing but a false choice.

And if the GMO agritech industry wishes to perpetuate the idea that one of its main motives is to promote 'choice' and help farmers (and thus consumers) then why does it work to ultimately deny choice? Once the genetic genie is out of the bottle, there may be no way of going back.

Roger Levett, specialist in sustainable development, argues ('Choice: Less can be more, in Food Ethics, Vol. 3, No. 3, Autumn 2008):

> "If some people are allowed to choose to grow, sell and consume GMO foods, soon nobody will be able to choose food, or a biosphere, free of GMOs. It's a one-way choice, like the introduction of rabbits or cane toads to Australia; once it's made, it can't be reversed."

There is sufficient evidence showing that GM and non-GM crops cannot co-exist. Indeed, contamination seems to be part of a cynical industry strategy. For instance, with GM food crops already illegally growing in India, what future India agriculture? What future farmers' choices?

It is convenient to paint critics of GMOs as being authoritarian and possessing an ideological agenda. Whether it is Bayer, Monsanto or one of the other major agritech/agribusiness concerns, the real agenda is clear: elite commercial interests and the maximisation of profit for shareholders are the driving forces behind GM agriculture.

Critics of GMOs and transnational corporations did not have a leading role in drafting the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights to create seed monopolies. Monsanto did. Critics did not write the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. The global food processing industry had a leading role in that (see this). Whether it involves Codex, the Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture aimed at restructuring Indian agriculture or the proposed US-EU trade deal (TTIP), the powerful

agribusiness/food lobby has secured privileged access to policy makers.

From the World Bank's 'enabling the business of agriculture' to the Gates Foundation's role in opening up African agriculture to the global food and agribusiness oligopolies, democratic procedures at sovereign state levels have been bypassed to impose seed monopolies and proprietary inputs on farmers and to incorporate them into a global supply chain dominated by powerful corporations.

From the destruction of indigenous agriculture in Ethiopia to the ongoing dismantling of Indian agriculture at the behest of transnational agribusiness, where is the 'choice'?

Source: Oriental Review

Ukraine's agriculture sector is being opened up to Monsanto. Iraq's seed laws were changed to facilitate the entry of Monsanto. India's edible oils sector was undermined to facilitate the entry of Cargill. And Bayer's hand is likely behind the ongoing strategy behind GM mustard in India. Whether through secretive trade deals, strings-attached loans or outright duplicity, the global food and agribusiness conglomerates have scant regard for choice or for democracy.

Localisation and traditional methods of food production have given way to globalised supply chains dominated by transnational companies policies and actions which have resulted in the destruction of habitat and livelihoods and the imposition of corporate-controlled, chemical-intensive (monocrop) agriculture that weds farmers and regions to a wholly exploitative system of neoliberal globalization.

Whether it involves the undermining or destruction of what were once largely self-sufficient agrarian economies in Africa or the devastating impacts of soy cultivation in Argentina or palm oil production in Indonesia, the role of transnational agribusiness has been devastating.

What choice do we as consumers have over the tens of thousands of synthetic agrochemicals contaminating our soil, oceans and food. How did they get on the market in the first place? Again, largely as a result of fraud.

What choice do consumers have over GM food when food conglomerates and Bayer have spent large sums of money to prevent labelling?

What choice does the public have when governments become de facto mouthpieces of the industry as they collude behind closed doors with powerful corporations?

What choice did Mexican farmers and consumers have over their right to healthy food when NAFTA (driven by the powerful food/agribusiness lobby in the US) drove farmers out of business and consumers towards bad food and poor health?

What right have corporations like Monsanto and Bayer to damage (see this too) health as well as natural resources that belong to humanity collectively? These entities with histories of criminality have convinced governments and the public that they have a right to own humanity's collective resources.

And with that in mind, how will a Monsanto-Bayer merger and increasing consolidation of the seed and agrochemical sector increase choice? It won't. It hints at of a dark future of corporate monopolies.

In their rush to readily promote neoliberal dogma and corporate-inspired PR, many government officials, scientists and journalists take as given that profit-driven transnational corporations have a legitimate claim to be custodians of natural assets. There is the premise that water, food, soil and agriculture should be handed over to powerful and wholly corrupt transnational corporations to milk for profit, under the pretence these entities are somehow serving the needs of humanity.

These natural assets ('the commons') belong to everyone and any stewardship should be carried out in the common interest by local people assisted by public institutions and governments acting on their behalf, not by private transnational corporations driven by self-interest and the maximization of profit by any means possible.

And that's the real agenda. That's the bottom line where choice is concerned.

We have been living in the shadow of global agribusiness and its impacts for too long.

When pro-GMO/pro-big agribusiness lobbyists take aim at critics, alleging they are denying choice and have an ideological/authoritarian agenda, they should look a little closer to home.

But to quote the writer Upton Sinclair:

> "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it."

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © Colin Todhunter, Global Research, 2018

Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: Colin Todhunter

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

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants

permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca