

Media Silence and the Agrochemicals Industry: The Slow Poisoning of Health and the Environment

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It's an all too common tale of dirty deeds, shady deals and propaganda. Rosemary Mason's recent open letter to journalists at The Guardian outlines how the media is failing the public by not properly reporting on the regulatory delinquency relating to GM food and the harmful chemicals being applied to crops. Much of the media is even (unwittingly) acting as a propaganda arm for big agritech companies.

An open 'Letter from America' was penned in November 2014 warning countries in Europe and EU regulators not to authorise (chemical-dependent) GM crops because of the devastating effects on human health and the environment. Mason notes that David Cameron ignored that advice. The European Commission and the European Food Safety Authority also ignored it and have continued to allow GM into food and feed in the EU and sanction the ongoing use of dangerous pesticides.

While there is undoubtedly good work being carried out by individual journalists in this area, Mason feels the media should be doing more to hold officials to account and should report more accurately on the consequences of the genetic modification of food as well as the effects of agrochemicals.

Instead, there seems to be an agenda to confuse the public or to push these issues to one side. From BBC Panorama's pro-GM programme last year, which was full of falsehoods and misrepresentations, to messages about 'lifestyle choices' being the main determinant of poor health, Mason implies that too many journalists are reinforcing the pesticides industry's assertion that cancers are caused by alcohol use and that the catalogue of diseases now affecting modern society comes down to individual choice.

Mason stresses that the media constantly link alcohol consumption with seven forms of cancer and this 'fact' is endlessly reinforced until people are brainwashed and believe it to be true. This, she argues, neatly diverts attention from the strong links between the increasing amounts of chemicals used in food and agriculture and serious diseases, including cancers.

She goes on to document how international and national health and food agencies have dismissed key studies and findings in their assessments of the herbicide glyphosate, and she provides much evidence that the chemical industry (not just the agritech sector) has created a toxic environment from which no one can escape. These agencies are guilty of regulatory delinquency due to (among other things, scientific fraud) conflicts of interest, which has enabled transnational agritech companies to dodge effective regulation by public institutions that, despite claims to the contrary, are anything but independent.

A combination of propaganda disseminated by industry front groups and conflicts of interest effectively allow dangerous chemicals and GMOs into the food chain and serve to keep the public in the dark about what is taking place and the impacts on their health.

Mason outlines how the industry set out to discredit the 'Seralini study' (highlighting adverse health impacts of glyphosate – the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup – and GMOs) and describes how the Science Media Centre (SMC) in the UK did its utmost to prevent the British public from hearing about negative reports and studies concerning Monsanto and GMO technology. The UK SMC was fulfilling its remit to prevent a repeat of incidents such as the uncritical reporting in 1998 of the claim made by Árpád Pusztai that rats fed on GM potatoes had stunted growth and a repressed immune system.

In France, Seralini's study was front page news but, according to Mason, journalists in the UK were manipulated and given little time to develop a potentially negative commentary. After the research was published, Professor Seralini was attacked by a vehement campaign orchestrated from within the industry as well as the industry-financed SMC.

Mason also documents how scientific fraud and corruption have also helped to fuel pro-GMO propaganda and get big agitech companies off the hook for their dangerous products. These companies have effectively coopted key academics and officials to do their bidding.

To reinforce her point, Mason cites William Engdahl to highlight the levels of collusion between the EU and the agritech sector over the reassessment of glyphosate. This exposed to the general public, for the first time in such a clear manner, the degree of corruption in not only Brussels but also in the so-called scientific bodies that advise it on what is safe and what not.

As with many of her previous open letters to officials and agencies, Mason cites an impressive array of evidence and studies to support her arguments. Readers are urged to read her letter in full: [Open Letter to The Guardian](#). The letter was originally addressed to the editor-in-chief but has since been sent to other journalists at The Guardian.

Mason has been a tireless campaigner against harmful pesticides and GMOs for many years and [has placed all of her correspondence](#) with governments and regulators on the Academia.edu site – a platform for academics to share research papers and preview papers. She has done this to provide open access to information that will help the public to hold agencies and individuals to account over their willingness to sacrifice human health by using flawed science and corrupt practices in order to boost corporate profits.

In a little over five years, Mason has written and sent 36 documents to various agencies urging them to act. She has however received few replies. She did get a reply from the President of the National Farmers Union who wrote to defend the right of farmers to use chemicals to protect their crops, even though she had informed him (citing relevant evidence) that they were damaging the brains of children in Britain.

She has occasionally received brief responses from other officials who have effectively implied 'move on, nothing to discuss', despite the strong (peer-reviewed) studies and evidence used to support her case.

What Mason describes in her open letter is not unique to the UK or Europe. The model of

chemical-intensive industrialised food and agriculture she alludes to is being rolled out across the globe thanks to the capture and cooptation of various international agencies and decision-making bodies at the national level.

Whether through strings-attached loans, rigged trade rules or corrupt trade agreements and intellectual property rights regimes co-written by powerful corporations, the result is a model of corporate-controlled, chemically drenched agriculture that leads to degraded soils, unsustainable pressure on (increasingly polluted) water resources, increased vulnerability to drought, less diverse diets, nutrient-deficient crops, the [destruction of livelihoods, the undermining of local food security and the displacement of indigenous farming](#) as well as the [globalisation of bad food and poor health](#).

Although it may appear to be a case of 'business as usual' for industry and its well-funded lobbyists (whose ubiquitous presence in Brussels effectively puts paid to any credible notion of 'democracy') and scientists, the pressure from various groups and tireless individuals like Rosemary Mason to hold the agritech cartel to account is incessant.

Aside from accessing Mason's reports and open letters on the Academia.edu site, readers can consult the stream of reports listed on the [Corporate Europe Observatory website](#) that document how industry is contaminating our food, destroying our health and adversely impacting the environment, while certain officials facilitate the process.

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