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Obama Gives Key Agriculture Post to Monsanto Man

By Gary Ruskin
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Today, President Obama announced that he will recess appoint Islam A. Siddiqui to the position of Chief Agricultural Negotiator, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

Siddiqui is a pesticide lobbyist and Vice President for Science and Regulatory Affairs at CropLife America, an agribusiness lobbying group that represents Monsanto.

Following is a letter sent by 98 organizations to U.S. Senators in opposition to Siddiqui's appointment, and a fact sheet about him.

Dear Senator:

The following 98 organizations are writing you to express our opposition to the nomination of Islam Siddiqui as Chief Agriculture Negotiator at the office of the United States Trade Representative. Our organizations— representing family farmers, farmworkers, fishers and sustainable agriculture, environmental, consumer, anti-hunger and other advocacy groups—urge you to reject Dr. Siddiqui's appointment when it comes up for a floor vote, despite the Senate Finance Committee's favorable report of his nomination on December 23, 2009.

Siddiqui's record at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and his role as a former registered lobbyist for CropLife America (whose members include Monsanto, Syngenta, DuPont and Dow), has revealed him to consistently favor agribusinesses' interests over the interests of consumers, the environment and public health (see attached fact sheet). We believe Siddiqui's nomination severely weakens the Obama Administration's credibility in promoting healthier and more sustainable local food systems here at home. His appointment would also send an unfortunate signal to the rest of the world that the United States plans to continue down the failed path of high-input and energy-intensive industrial agriculture by promoting toxic pesticides, inappropriate seed biotechnologies and unfair trade agreements on nations that do not want and can least afford them.

The United States urgently needs a trade negotiator who understands that current trade agreements work neither for farmers nor the world's hungry. With farmers here and abroad struggling to respond to water scarcity and increasingly volatile growing conditions, we need a resilient and restorative model of agriculture that adapts to and mitigates climate change and that moves us towards energy-efficient farming.

The most comprehensive analysis of global agriculture to date, the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) states unequivocally that "business as usual is not an option." We need a new, sustainable model of biodiverse, ecologically-based agriculture that regenerates soil health, sequesters carbon,

feeds communities, protects farmworkers and puts profits back in the hands of family farmers and rural communities. Siddiqui's track record shows that he favors none of these solutions.

We call on the Senate to reject Islam Siddiqui's nomination and reorient trade policy to serve the interests of family farmers, farmworkers, consumers and the planet.

Sincerely,

[List of 98 organizations below.]

Siddiqui and CropLife: Statements and Positions

Islam Siddiqui was nominated by US President Barack Obama to the position of Chief Agricultural Negotiator at the office of the US Trade Representative. He is currently Vice President of Science and Regulatory Affairs at CropLife America. CropLife is an agricultural industry trade group that lobbies on behalf of Monsanto, DuPont, Syngenta and other pesticide and agricultural biotech corporations.

Siddiqui's statements and positions—both as a public official and as an industry executive—coupled with CropLife America's consistent record on public policy issues demonstrate a narrow and short-sighted view of American agriculture and trade interests. This viewpoint consistently places the special interests of large agribusiness above the health and welfare interests the broader public, the international community and the environment.

WHAT DOES SIDDIQUI'S POSITION ENTAIL?

Enforcing Trade Agreements

According to the Progressive Government Institute, the Chief Agricultural Negotiator "conducts critical trade negotiations and enforces trade agreements… This includes multilaterally in the World Trade Organization (WTO), regionally in the Free Trade Area of the Americas, and bilaterally with various countries and groups of countries. The ambassador also resolves agricultural trade disputes and enforces trade agreements, including issues related to new technologies, subsidies, and tariff and non-tariff barriers and meets regularly with domestic agricultural industry groups to assure their interest are represented in trade." The industry groups' interests will be more than adequately represented, as the WTO's Doha Round will be a perfect opportunity for the agrochemical industry to push for trade agreements that maintain US subsidies, lower tariffs on chemicals, promote GM crops, and unfairly benefit the agrochemical companies that Siddiqui represents.

Source: http://www.progressivegovernment.org/appointee_data4.php?...

Legislative Influence and Defining 'Sound Science'

Another part of the job description is that "He or she also coordinates closely with the US government regulatory agencies to assure that rules and policies in international trade are based on sound science." Siddiqui's background has always favored "sound science" to mean high-cost, high-input (and high profit, for CropLife's members) agricultural practices being imposed on developing countries, despite their preferences. Many countries have chosen to ban GMOs on the precautionary principle, including the EU, but Siddiqui will be

able to use the trade talks as leverage so that CropLife's member companies can force their way around those precautions. Siddiqui will also be able to influence the results of the Casey-Lugar Global Food Security Act Bill (which mandates government funding for biotechnology research).

SIDDIQUI AN APOLOGIST FOR AGRICHEMICAL AND BIOTECH INDUSTRIES

Siddiqui Claimed EU Rejection of GMOs was "Denying Food to Starving People"

In 2003, Siddiqui applauded the Bush Administration's decision to seek an end to the EU's moratorium on approval of imports of genetically modified crops. Croplife America said the EU's position had "no scientific foundation" and Siddiqui said, "EU's illegal moratorium has had a negative ripple effect of creeping regulations and non-science-based decisions, which have resulted in denying food to starving people. The WTO requires that international trade rules be based on sound science, and today's decision will send that strong message to the EU and other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America." [Delta Farm Press, 5/23/03]

Siddiqui Compared GMO Acceptance to Accepting "Microwave Ovens"

In 2002, Siddiqui claimed biotech foods have been proven to be as safe as traditionally grown foods. He cited a similar distrust of a new technology many people had when microwave ovens were first introduced; eventually, consumer acceptance of the technology became widespread. [State Department Washington File, 11/25/02]

Siddiqui Criticized EU for Insisting On "Precautionary Principle" On GMOs

In 2002, Siddiqui criticized the European Union's precautionary principle rationale for rejecting the import of GMOs. Widely recognized in the international community, the precautionary principle allows societies to protect people and the planet when there are uncertainties or unknown risks associated with the introduction or use of a product. Siddiqui said the principle didn't offer any more real protection to citizens than U.S.- "science-based" regulations and was being used by politicians as a non-tariff trade barrier. [State Department Washington File, 11/25/02]

Siddiqui Called for New Biotech Green Revolution

Statement by Siddiqui this year on new Green Revolution: "What we need now in the 21st century is another revolution, which some people are calling the second green revolution… You need to have use of 21st century technologies, including biotechnology, genetic technology, and all the other technologies, which are being (inaudible), in terms of achieving that."

Source: "Green Innovation: Can Patents Help Make the World a Bett… April 22, 2009

Siddiqui Rejected Consumer Labeling of GMOs While Working at USDA

As a special assistant for trade at USDA, Siddiqui in 1999 warned Japan that if they implemented mandatory labeling of foods containing genetically modified organisms (GMOs) it could mislead consumers about food safety and disrupt trade. Siddiqui said, "We do not believe that obligatory GMO labeling is necessary, because it would suggest a health risk where there is none." He added, "Mandatory labeling could mislead consumers about the safety of these products and require segregation of GMO and non-GMO foods. I fear major

trade disruptions and increases in food costs to consumers if Japan requires mandatory labeling." Siddiqui also said Japan, as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), is obligated to find the least trade-restrictive way of achieving its objectives. There are a number of ways other than labeling, such as educational materials and public forums, to provide consumers with information on genetic engineering, he said. [Reuters, 7/27/1999]

Siddiqui is a Former Registered Lobbyist

From 2001- 2003, Islam Siddiqui was a registered lobbyist with CropLife America, which spent just over $2 million on lobbying the federal government in 2008, and just under $1.9 million in 2007 on issues like registering pesticides for use in schools, limiting the Endangered Species Act so that it doesn't inhibit agricultural pesticide use, revision of EPA pesticide registration fees, and fighting the EPA on restrictions to the use of fumigants.

CROPLIFE AMERICA REGIONAL PARTNER TARGETED MICHELLE OBAMA ORGANIC GARDEN

CropLife America's Regional Partner Targeted Michelle Obama Organic Garden

CropLife America's regional partner had notoriously "shuddered" at Michelle Obama's organic White House garden for failing to use chemical pesticides and launched a letter petition drive defending chemical intensive agriculture and urging Michelle Obama to consider using pesticidies and herbicides. Mid America CropLife Association is listed as a regional partner on CropLife America's website.

Letter: http://susty.com/michelle-obama-letter-mid-america-cropli...

SIDDIQUI OVERSAW FIASCO OVER USDA's FIRST PROPOSED ORGANIC STANDARDS

Siddiqui Instrumental in Drafting First Proposed Organic Standards that Would Have Allowed Toxic Sludge, GMOs and Irradiated Food to be Labeled "Organic"

As Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs at USDA, Siddiqui oversaw the release of the first-ever proposed federal standards for organics, an accomplishment the White House has cited in support of his nomination. However, these rules created an uproar when USDA overruled recommendations of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) and permitted the use of GMOs, irradiation and toxic sludge under the organic label. Only after 230,000 comments flooded into USDA were these standards strengthened. It remains one of the highest outpourings of public sentiment on any government regulation in U.S. history. [Mother Jones]

Siddiqui Admitted USDA Overruled Organics Board Recommendations

Siddiqui justified allowing for possible allowance of GMOs, irradiated foods and toxic sludge under the organics by saying, "we know that [the] Organics Board had recommended against those two items in the organic agriculture. There's a considerable debate on these issues; it's a public debate issue. So essentially, the department has felt that we want to open it up, we want to seek comments. And it could be any one of the three choices; either it could be allowed, it could be prohibited, or it could be allowed on a case-by-case basis, especially dealing with GMOs. [Federal News Service, 12/15/07]

Siddiqui Admitted Allowing no GMOs in Organics Would Possibly be "Inconsistent" with

Forcing GMOs on EU

Siddiqui explained one of the reasons GMOs were not banned under organic label was because " ... some of the agencies within the U.S. government felt that we will be inconsistent in going to the EU and telling them to not require GMO contents being spelt out in ingredients." [Food and Drink Weekly, 1/19/98]

CROPLIFE AMERICA SPENT HALF-MILLION TO DEFEAT COUNTY-LEVEL ANTI-GMO INITIATIVE

CropLife Spent $500,000 to Defeat County Ballot Banning GMOs

"In March 2004, CropLife poured funding into a campaign to defeat a Mendocino County ballot initiative – known as Measure H – that would make the country the first to ban genetically engineered crops. In the lead up to the vote, CropLife contributed over $500,000 – more than seven times that of the initiative supporters – to defeat the proposal. [1] Despite the massive campaign against the initiative, the bio-tech industry suffered a humiliating defeat. The measure passed by a margin of 56% to 43%. [2]"

Siddiqui Said "Pleased" by Defeat of Ballot Measures

Siddiqui, on behalf of CropLife America, said he was pleased that voters in three California counties had rejected proposed bans on biotech crop cultivation. "I think you'll see more counties in California try[proposing a ban]the next time they can get it on the ballot," he said, adding that similar initiatives are unlikely in other states. [Food Chemical News, 1/3/05]

CROPLIFE AMERICA CONSISTENTLY FAVORS AGRIBUSINESS INTERESTS OVER PUBLIC INTEREST

CropLife Lobbied to Allow Children to be Used for Pesticide Experiments

In August 2005, CropLife America met with Bush Administration officials at the Office of Managment and Budget and EPA to allow for children to participate in pesticide experiments. CropLife America urged certain allowances to be made for chemical testing on children. Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility criticized the meeting for excluding the perspectives of ethicists, child advocates and scientists. EPA one month later adopted a human testing rule in line with CropLife America's suggestions. Environmental groups sued the EPA for failing to adequately protect women and children. [Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, 5/30/06]

PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruck commented on the backdoor meeting, "These meeting notes make it clear that the pesticide industry's top objective is access to children for experiments. After reading these ghoulish notes one has the urge to take a shower. For an administration which trumpets its concern for the 'value and dignity of life,' it is disconcerting that no ethicists, children advocates or scientists were invited to this meeting to counterbalance the pesticide pushers." [Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, 5/30/06]

Supported Use of Human Test Subjects

In 2003, CropLife America expressed pleasure that the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned EPA's moratorium on using human clinical test data in pesticide risk assessment. The court

ruled that EPA's "previous practice of considering third- party human studies on a case-by-case basis, applying statutory requirements, the Common Rule, and high ethical standards as a guide, is reinstated and remains in effect unless and until it is replaced by a lawfully promulgated regulation." "We are pleased that the court recognized that EPA's moratorium constituted a binding regulation issued without notice and the opportunity to comment," said Jay J. Vroom, head of CropLife America. [U.S. Newswire, 6/3/03]

CropLife America Secured Continued Use Of Banned Ozone-Depleting Pesticide, Methyl Bromide

CropLife America supported the continued use of methyl bromide by farmers in the U.S. despite its supposed ban under the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (Protocol) and the Clean Air Act (CAA). The Bush administration secured an exemption of the highly controversial chemical in 2006. "By no means is there one product that will fit all the critical uses of methyl bromide today," CropLife CEO Jay Vroom said. The continued exemptions are needed while research continues on the alternative pesticides, he said, adding, "We're not there yet, and the American farmer needs to have these tools so we can continue to be have viable exports." Source: Associated Press, Nov 4, 2006. For more information see the website for the UN Environmental Programme Ozone Secretariat. The PANNA website contains extensive resources and fact sheets on methyl bromide's use for soil fumigation.

· Methyl bromide, a powerful ozone depleter used on strawberries, tomatoes, grapes and other crops. The EPA has classified methyl bromide as a Toxicity Category I compound, the most deadly category of substances due to causing neurological damage and reproductive harm. Farmworkers in particular have experienced death, birth defects, blurred vision, nausea, and dizziness as a result of direct exposure to methyl bromide. Methyl Bromide has also been listed as a Class I Ozone Depleter under the Clean Air Act. Methyl bromide is a highly toxic pesticide.

· From 1982 to 1990, at least 18 people in California died from exposure to methyl bromide. The state Department of Pesticide Regulation also reports at least 148 systemic illnesses, 52 eye injuries and 60 cases of skin damage from methyl bromide. Methyl bromide has also caused birth defects in studies required by U.S. EPA and submitted by the manufacturer.

· Methyl bromide is toxic to the central nervous system and can damage lungs and kidneys and possibly cause cancer. Direct exposure can lead to headaches, blurred vision, nausea and dizziness. Many farmworkers and residents near fumigated fields have experienced these symptoms. [Pesticide Action Network]

Croplife America Resistant to International Regulations Over Toxic Chemicals

Croplife America has been a driving force to weaken the U.S. position on the Stockholm Convention, a critical effort to regulate the use of toxic "persistent organic pollutants (POPs)." These include the well known chemicals DDT, PCBs and dioxins that have been linked to a host of serious human health problems and environmental concerns. Even at very low levels of exposure, POPs can cause reproductive and developmental disorders, damage to the immune and nervous systems, and a range of cancers. CropLife America has argued that "American sovereignty" concerns should override the treaty if the chemical regulations are stronger than U.S. law. CropLife America explicitly calls for the U.S. to

“protect export markets for American produce and farm commodities,” even if they use chemicals that may be outlawed by the POP treaties. [CropLife America Website]

CropLife America Argues for Allowing Usage of Toxic Endosulfans

Croplife America and its international counterpart CropLife International, whom Siddiqui has represented in international negotiations, have continuously argued for a legitimate role for the dangerous POP endosulfan. However in October 2009, scientists declared that: “endosulfan is likely, as a result of its long-range environmental transport, to lead to significant adverse human health and environmental effects, such that global action is warranted.” The finding sets the stage for a global ban under the Stockholm Convention. Endosulfan is an endocrine disruptor, and low dose exposure while in the womb is linked to male reproductive harm, autism, and birth defects. High dose exposures are acutely toxic, resulting in headaches, nausea and vomiting, seizures, and in extreme cases, unconsciousness and death. [Manila Bulletin, 10/20/09]

CropLife America Withdrew from Landmark UN/World Bank Study on Ag Research (IAASTD) that Highlighted Agroecological Science as Promising Way to “Feed the World”

CropLife Upset Industry Viewpoint Not Allowed to Dictate Findings

CropLife International participated in the UN/World Bank-sponsored International Assessment for Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) for 4 years, before withdrawing in the final days of the process. The IAASTD reports—authored by over 400 scientists and development experts from more than 80 countries, and subjected to two open public review processes—remains the most authoritative study to date on agriculture research and technology. CropLife objected to the measured but lukewarm findings of the IAASTD on “modern biotechnology” and genetic engineering. According to the spokesman for CropLife, their decision to withdraw in the final days was prompted by “the inability of its members to get industry perspectives reflected in the draft reports” —a complaint belied by the fact that IAASTD editors repeatedly offered CropLife a “blank page” to present the industry’s viewpoints. Ultimately, industry authors failed to submit text in time for publication.

The IAASTD concluded that an increase in investments in agroecological practices would be necessary to meet 21st century needs, noting that agroecological, organic, biodiverse and regenerative practices represented highly promising and scientifically robust approaches to feeding the world while also meeting social equity and sustainability goals, particularly under increasing stresses of climate change, water scarcity and fossil-fuel based energy limitations. In contrast, the IAASTD observed that chemical intensive and GMO-based practices were unlikely to meet these goals, had in many cases undermined public health and/or contaminated the environment, and posed severe social equity concerns due to industry concentration, IPR and patent rules. [Bioscience Resource, New Scientist, PANNA]

Prepared by Lindsey Schneider and Vera Glavova, PANNA, with contributions from National Family Farm Coalition. For further information on CropLife:http://www.panna.org/resources/pops, http://www.panna.org/resources/treaties

Pesticide Action Network has worked to replace pesticides with ecologically sound and socially just alternatives since 1982. PANNA is one of five regional facilitating organizations serving a global network of more than 600 civil society groups in over 90 countries who

share these goals. For more information, see http://www.panna.org.

98 organizations who signed on to the letter to the Senate:

Alaska Community Action on Toxics (AK)
AllergyKids (CO)
American Raw Milk Producers Pricing Association (WI)
Beyond Pesticides (DC)
Breast Cancer Action (CA)
California Food and Justice Coalition (CA)
Californians for GE-Free Agriculture (CA)
Californians for Pesticide Reform (CA)
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation (CA)
Center for Environmental Health (CA)
Center for Food Safety (DC)
Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment (CA)
Central Florida Jobs with Justice Project (FL)
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach (NE)
Community Farm Alliance (KY)
Concerned Citizens for Clean Air (OR)
Cornucopia Institute (WI)
Earth Justice (CA)
Equal Exchange (MA)
Fair Trade Coalition (MN)
Family Farm Defenders (WI)
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance (TX)
Farm Worker Pesticide Project (WA)
Farmworker Association of Florida (FL)
Farmworker Justice (DC)
Farmworkers Self-Help (FL)
Food & Water Watch (DC)
Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy (CA)
Food for Maine's Future (ME)
Florida Immigrant Coalition (FL)
Food Democracy Now! (IA)
Food Systems Integrity (MA)
Florida Organic Growers (FL)
Fresno Metro Ministry (CA)
Friends of the Earth (DC, CA)
Greenpeace US (DC, CA)
Grassroots International (MA)
Growing Power Inc. (WI)
Indigenous Environmental Network (MN) Indiana Toxics Action (IN) Innovative Farmers of Ohio (OH) Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy (MN)
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (IA)
Kids for Saving Earth (MN)
Kentucky Environmental Foundation (KY)
Land Stewardship Project (MN)
Lideres Campesinas (CA)
Maine Fair Trade Campaign (ME)

Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners (ME)
Maryland Pesticide Network (MD)
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives (MS)
Missouri Rural Crisis Center (MO)
Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative (OK)
National Family Farm Coalition (DC)
National Farm Worker Ministry (MO)
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association (DC)
New York Environmental Law & Justice (NY)
Northeast Organic Farming Association Interstate Council (CT)
Northern Plains Resource Council (MT)
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (ME)
Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (OR)
Oakland Institute (CA)
Ohio Conference on Fair Trade (OH)
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project (OK)
Oregon Fair Trade Campaign (OR)
Oregon Toxics Alliance (OR)
Organic Consumers Association (MN)
Partners for the Land & Agricultural Needs of Traditional Peoples (WV)
Pesticide Action Network North America (CA)
Pesticide Free Zone (CA)
Pesticide Watch (CA)
Physicians for Social Responsibility/Los Angeles (CA)
Public Citizen (DC)
Rochesterians Against the Misuse of Pesticides (NY)
Rural Advancement Foundation International USA (NC)
Rural Coalition/ Coalición Rural
Safe Alternatives for our Forest Environment (CA)
Science and Environmental Health Network (IA)
Sciencecorps (MA)
Search for the Cause (CA)
Sierra Club (CA, DC)
Small Holders Alliance of Massachusetts (MA)
Student Action with Farmworkers (NC)
The Endocrine Disruption Exchange (CO)
The Safe Lawns Foundation (ME)
The Second Chance Foundation Washington (WA)
Washington Fair Trade Coalition (WA)
Western Organization of Resource Councils (MT)
World Hunger Year (NY)

http://www.greenchange.org/article.php?id=5713

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