

Pesticides, GMOs and Corporate Control: The Poster Child is Monsanto but Neil Young is the Main Act

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Neil Young has a long history of activism. He is a co-founder of Farm Aid, which works to support small and family farmers in North America, while his song Ohio is [often considered](#) to be one of the greatest protest songs ever made. Last year, Young pledged a [\\$100,000 donation](#) to Vermont's legal fight against the GMO-labelling lawsuit, and he has recently been involved in putting together a [new website](#) that will help people engage with issues such as GMOs, farming, ecology, justice and climate change (access the site [here](#)).

His new albums The Monsanto Years (2015) and Earth (2016) have a strong anti-corporate theme running through them and feature songs exploring global hunger, pesticides, GMOs, seeds and ecology. Young spent part of 2015 touring the US. The tour was different from the usual concert tour because it was accompanied by an 'activist village' comprising a coalition of leading non-profit organisations housed in numerous tents.



These organisations travelled with Young and his band to raise awareness and educate concert-goers about the deleterious impacts of industrial agriculture, environmental issues and the negative impact of corporate control of government. The tours gave a diverse group of NGOs involved in ecology and social justice issues an opportunity to reach out to the public with their message and materials.

The village comprised six tents with the themes of GMOs, earth ecology, energy and climate, freedom and justice, future of farming and news you can trust (the same as those on the new website). The host NGOs were also keen to bring in local groups to highlight local initiatives.

[GMO Free USA](#) hosted the GMO education tent. Diana Reeves, GMO Free USA Executive Director, says Young's inclusion of her organisation on his national tour brings the GMO issue to music fans who might have otherwise not known about it. It also gave the organisation the chance to connect with many farm belt residents.

She says:

"I heard story after story from residents who were concerned about increasing rates of cancer. 'My father has cancer. My aunt has cancer. My neighbors have cancer', said one concertgoer. At another venue we met a couple – he was a cancer survivor and his very pregnant wife was battling cancer. It was heartbreaking. We heard stories from farmers who have no choice but to grow GM crops because they are surrounded by neighbors who are growing them. We were told that they were certain they would be sued by Monsanto if they grew non-GMO because contamination by pollen drift would be inevitable. But

they're afraid to speak out. These GMO growers are their neighbors. Their friends. Even their family members."

Reeves founded GMO Free USA with the organisation's first and ongoing campaign, a [national boycott](#) of the Kellogg Company. Kellogg's net sales have been down for seven out of eight quarters.

She adds:

"The great thing about the boycott is that it happens at a personal level and you can effect change without having 'activist' stamped on your forehead. It only takes one major food company to change the entire industry. America doesn't want GMOs. The faster Kellogg's gets the message, the faster their financial outlook will improve. I'm looking forward to connecting with people along the West Coast, educating and growing the boycott."

Thousands of educational brochures about GMOs and postcards informing people of the Kellogg's boycott were distributed in all the cities during the July Midwestern and East Coast tour.

The public response during the tour was overwhelmingly positive. Luan Van Le, GMO Free USA Communications Director, states:

"We imagined there would be more resistance to the information we were distributing in the Midwestern GMO agriculture belt. But what we found was strong support... Neil had the courage to record an unreserved album about the most pressing issues in this country and on this planet. There is too much at stake today to be silent or passive."

Coming to Europe

Neil Young argues that 'The Monsanto Years' are here and we are living them:

"Monsanto is the poster-child for what is wrong with corporate controlled government in our world. The Monsanto Years encompasses several associated subjects that millions of people worldwide are concerned about and active in. Earth is not ours. We are of the Earth. That's how I feel. When we plunder our own home we hurt our children and their children after them."

At a time when there is a concern about the [corrupt TTIP](#) leading to an [influx of GMOs](#) into Europe, the UK government [working hand in glove](#) with the GMO biotech to get [GM crops planted](#) in England above the heads of the public and apprehension about new genetic engineering techniques [side-stepping regulations](#), Young is bringing his combination of music and activism to Europe.

As was the case in North America, the activist village will be part and parcel of the package. [Beyond GM](#) was an integral part of the North American tour and will be managing all the GMO tents during the UK/Republic of Ireland (ROI) leg and coordinating the GMO tents on the European mainland segment.

Beyond GM believes that campaigning needs to change and the tour presents a great opportunity. Co-founder and Director Pat Thomas Public feels that outreach and finding ways of taking the issues to the people is key to promoting engagement and change and that this kind of tour is ideal for reaching out to large groups of people who are not the 'usual suspects' – the same ones that turn up at every rally. In this respect, the activist village provides a platform for grassroots NGOs to engage with a much bigger audience, one that may be sympathetic to their causes but which is not necessarily attracted to attend marches or meetings.

Pat Thomas states:

"The majority of people want to be GM free and believe the UK is somehow 'safe'. Few realise that the meat and dairy they are eating is GM-fed or that the UK government is stealthily – and undemocratically – pushing ahead with plans to plant GMOs on our soil by 2017. New field trials have just been given the go ahead for GM camelina and GM potatoes and we are on track to start living the GMO nightmare that people in the Americas are so desperately trying to escape. Big public forums like Neil Young's The Monsanto Years tour and its activist village are an important opportunity to open people's eyes to what's really going on."

There will be lots of information available. [GM Free Me](#) photos will be taken, and there will be various free organic giveaways. The UK leg of the tour hopes to focus on and bring in agroecological groups (for example, the [Landworkers' Alliance](#) and urban solutions like those the [Kindling Trust](#) works on) and also showcase local community supported agriculture projects.

GMO groups expected to be involved in the European segment of the tour include –

France: Inf'OGM

Spain: Amigos de la Tierra

Belgium: The Field Liberation Movement

Finland: Associated Organizations and Citizens to Promote GMO Free Finland

Sweden: Friends of the Earth Sweden (stil tbc)

Norway: Nettverk for GMO-fri mat og fôr (Network for GMO-free food and animal feed)

Netherlands: ASEED (Action for Solidarity Environment Equality and Diversity)

Switzerland: StopOGM

Italy: Slow Food

Germany: Gen Ethisches Netzwerk

Austria: Global2000

Farming groups will include (others to be confirmed) –

Dublin: Landworkers Alliance

Belfast: Boxa + another CSA scheme with info from Irish Organic Farmers & Growers

Belgium: Bioforum's new agroecology network of 16 organisations

Finland: Southern Finland Organic Farming Association

Netherlands: working with ASEED again but to put together a different agroecology network

Neil Young European Tour Dates

There may be one or two dates/venues not yet confirmed that are not included below, but they won't have a village in them.

UK/ROI

June 5 / Glasgow / SSE Hydro NO VILLAGE

June 7 / Belfast, Ireland / SSE Arena

June 8 / Dublin, Ireland / 3Arena

June 10 / Leeds, England / First Direct Arena

June 11 / London, England / O2 Arena

France

June 13 / Lille, France / Le Zenith de lille Arena

June 15 / Lyon, France / Halle Tony Garnier

June 16 / Marseille, France / Le Dôme de Marseille

Spain

June 18 / Madrid, Spain / Mad Cool Festival

June 20 / Barcelona, Spain / El Poble Espanyol

France

June 21 / Toulouse, France / Le Zenith de Toulouse

June 23 / Paris, France / AccorHotels Arena

Belgium

June 24 / Antwerp, Belgium / Sportpaleis Arena

Scandinavia

July 3 / Helsinki, Finland / Hartwall Arena

July 5 / Rattvik, Sweden / Dalhalla Amphitheater

July 7 / Larvik, Norway / Stavernfestivalen

Netherlands

July 9 / Amsterdam, Netherlands / Ziggo Dome

Switzerland

July 12 / Montreux, Switzerland / Montreux Jazz Fest, Auditorium Stravinski

Italy

July 13 / Padova, Italy / Villa Contarini Town Square

July 16 Lucca, Italy / Lucca Summer Festival, Piazza Napoleone

July 18 / Milan, Italy / Estathe Market Sound Festival

Germany

July 20 / Leipzig, Germany / Völkerschlachtdenkmal

July 21 / Berlin, Germany / Waldbühne Amphitheatre

Austria

July 23 / Linz, Austria / Clam Castle

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