

Sweat Shops, GMOs and Neoliberal Fundamentalism: The Agroecological Alternative to Global Capitalism

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#),
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Much of the argument in favour of GM agriculture involves little more than [misrepresentations](#) and [un scrupulous attacks](#) on those who express concerns about the technology and its impacts. These attacks are in part designed to whip up populist sentiment and denigrate critics so that corporate interests can [secure further control](#) over agriculture. They also serve to divert attention from the [underlying issues](#) pertaining to hunger and poverty and [genuine solutions](#), as well as the [self-interest](#) of the pro-GMO lobby itself.

The very foundation of the GMO agritech sector is based on a [fraud](#). The sector and the wider transnational agribusiness cartel to which it belongs have also successfully [captured for their own interests](#) many international and national bodies and policies, including the WTO, various trade deals, governments institutions and regulators. From fraud to duplicity, little wonder then the sector is ridden with fear and paranoia.

“They are scared to death,” [says Marion Nestle](#), professor of nutrition, food studies, and public health at New York University and author of several books on food policy. She adds: “They have an industry to defend and are attacking in the hope that they’ll neutralize critics ... It’s a paranoid industry and has been from the beginning.”

War against reason

Global corporations like Monsanto are waging an ideological war against not only critics but the public too. For instance, consider that the majority of the [British](#) public and the [Canadian](#) public have valid concerns about GM food and do not want them. However, the British government was found to have been secretly [colluding with the industry](#) and the Canadian government is attempting to [soften up the public](#) to try to get people to change their opinions.

Instead of respecting public opinion and serving the public interest by holding powerful corporations to account, officials seem more inclined to serve the interests of the sector, regardless of genuine concerns about GM that, despite what the industry would like to have believe, are grounded in facts and involve rational discourse.

Whether via the roll-out of GMOs or an associated chemical-intensive industrialised monocrop system of agriculture, the agritech/agribusiness sector wants to further expand its influence throughout the globe. Beneath the [superficial façade](#) of working in the interest

of humanity, however, the sector is driven by a neoliberal fundamentalism [which demands](#) the entrenchment of capitalist agriculture via deregulation and the corporate control of seeds, land, fertilisers, water, pesticides and food processing.

If anything matters to the corporate agribusiness/agritech industry, contrary to the public image it tries to convey, it clearly has little to do with 'choice', 'democracy' or objective science. It has more to do with [undermining and debasing](#) these concepts and displacing existing systems of production: economies are "opened up through the concurrent displacement of a pre-existing productive system. Small and medium-sized enterprises are pushed into bankruptcy or obliged to produce for a global distributor, state enterprises are privatised or closed down, independent agricultural producers are impoverished" (Michel Chossudovsky in *The Globalization of Poverty*, p16).

Critics are highlighting not only [how the industry has](#) subverted and debased science and [has infiltrated](#) key public institutions and regulatory bodies, but they are also showing how trade and aid is used to [subjugate regions](#) and the [most productive components](#) of global agriculture – the [small/peasant farmer](#) – to the needs of powerful commercial entities.

Critics stab at the heart of neoliberalism

By doing this, critics stab hard at the heart such corporate interests and their neoliberal agenda.

According to [Eric Holt-Giménez](#):

"The World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the World Food Program, the Millennium Challenge, The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and industrial giants like Yara Fertilizer, Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, Syngenta, DuPont, and Monsanto, carefully avoid addressing the root causes of the food crisis. The 'solutions' they prescribe are rooted in the same policies and technologies that created the problem in the first place: increased food aid, de-regulated global trade in agricultural commodities, and more technological and genetic fixes. These measures only strengthen the corporate status quo controlling the world's food... The future of our food-and-fuel-systems are being decided de facto by unregulated global markets, financial speculators, and global monopolies."

The geopolitics of food and agriculture has played a [significant role](#) in creating food-deficit regions. For instance, African agriculture [has been reshaped](#) on behalf of the interests described in the above extract. [The Gates Foundation is currently spearheading](#) the ambitions of corporate America and the scramble for Africa by global agribusiness. And in India, there has been an [ongoing attempt](#) to do the same: a project that is now reaching a [critical phase](#) as the motives of the state [acting on behalf of private \(foreign\) capital](#) are laid bare and the [devastating effects](#) on health, environment and social conditions are clear for all to see.

Any serious commitment to feeding the world sustainably and equitably must work to challenge a globalised system of capitalism that has produced [structural inequality and poverty](#); a system which fuels the marginalisation of small-scale farms and their [vitality important](#) cropping systems and is responsible for the devastating impacts of [food commodity speculation](#), [land takeovers](#), [rigged trade](#) and an [industrial system of agriculture](#).

And embedded within the system is a certain mentality. Whether it is the likes of Monsanto's [High Grant](#), [Robb Fraley](#) or Bill Gates, highly paid (multi-millionaire) white men with an [ideological commitment to corporate power](#) are trying to force a profitable but bogus model of food production on the world.

They do so while conveniently ignoring the effects of a system of capitalism that they so clearly promote and have financially profited from.

It is a capitalism and a system of agriculture propped up by the blood money of militarism ([Ukraine](#) and [Iraq](#)), 'structural adjustment' and strings-attached loans ([Africa](#)) or slanted trade deals ([India](#)) whereby transnational agribusiness drives a global agenda to suit its interests and eradicate impediments to profit. And it doesn't matter [how much devastation](#) ensues or how unsustainable their model is, 'crisis management' and 'innovation' fuel the [corporate-controlled treadmill](#) they seek to impose.

Genuine solutions: agroecology, decentralisation and localism

However, what really irks the corporate interests which fuel the current GMO/chemical-intensive industrialised model of agriculture is that critics are offering genuine alternatives and solutions. They advocate a shift towards more organic-based systems of agriculture, which includes providing support to small farms and an agroecology movement that is empowering to people politically, socially and economically.

This represents a challenge to all good [neoliberal evangelists](#) (and [outright hypocrites](#)) with a stake in corporate agriculture who rely on smears to attack those who advocate for such things.

To understand what agroecology involves, let us turn to [Raj Patel](#):

"To understand what agro-ecology is, it helps first to understand why today's agriculture is called "industrial." Modern farming turns fields into factories. Inorganic fertilizer adds nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorous to the soil; pesticides kill anything that crawls; herbicides nuke anything green and unwanted—all to create an assembly line that spits out a single crop... Agro-ecology uses nature's far more complex systems to do the same thing more efficiently and without the chemistry set. Nitrogen-fixing beans are grown instead of inorganic fertilizer; flowers are used to attract beneficial insects to manage pests; weeds are crowded out with more intensive planting. The result is a sophisticated polyculture—that is, it produces many crops simultaneously, instead of just one."

And it works. Look no further than what Cuba has achieved and the successes outlined in [this article](#). Indeed, [much has been written](#) about agroecology and its potential for radical social change, its successes and the challenges it faces (see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)). And now there a major new book from Food First and Groundswell International: [Fertile Ground: Scaling agroecology from the ground up](#).

Executive Director of Food First Eric Holtz-Gimenez argues that agroecology offers [concrete, practical solutions](#) to many of the world's problems that move beyond (but which are linked to) agriculture. In doing so, it challenges – and offers alternatives to – the prevailing moribund doctrinaire economics of a neoliberalism that drives a [failing system](#) (also see [this](#) and [this](#)) of GM/chemical-intensive industrial agriculture.

He adds that the scaling up of agroecology can tackle hunger, malnutrition, environmental degradation and climate change. By creating securely paid labour-intensive agricultural work, it can also address the interrelated links between labour offshoring by rich countries and the removal of rural populations elsewhere who end up in sweat shops to carry out the outsourced jobs: the two-pronged process of neoliberal globalisation that [has devastated](#) the economies of the US and UK and which is [displacing existing indigenous food production systems and undermining the rural infrastructure in places like India](#) to produce a reserve army of cheap labour.

When you fail to understand capitalism and the central importance of agriculture, you fail to grasp many of the issues currently affecting humanity. At the same time, when you are part of the problem and fuel and benefit from it, you will do your best to attack and denigrate anything or anyone that challenges your interests.

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