

GM crops are driving genocide and ecocide - keep them out of the EU!

Helena Paul

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The unfolding human and ecological disaster of GM agriculture in the Americas must send the EU a powerful message, writes Helena Paul. We don't want it here, and we should stop buying the products of GM-driven genocide and ecocide abroad.

We currently face a desperate, almost farcical push for GM crops in the UK and Europe, characterised by hyperbolic and inaccurate claims.

So rather than taking those claims on trust, let's look at the impacts of GM crops in countries that have adopted them. That means North and South America, where GM crops were first launched in 1996.

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Brazil - the world's largest agrochemical user

Brazil, Uruguay and Bolivia have also been affected by the spread of GM soya. A Brazilian agronomist, Leonardo Melgarejo, who represents the Ministry of Agrarian Development at the country's GMO regulatory body, says that GM crops are weakening the social fabric that is essential if people are to be able to flourish in rural areas.

He also notes that Brazil, where GM crops are grown on 36 million hectares, has become the largest user of agrochemicals in the world. [Google translation into English]

It is leading to a vicious cycle of weed resistance requiring the use of ever more, and more toxic, herbicides. To address this, Brazil is now considering the introduction of a GM crop that tolerates 2,4-D (see below).

The US - more of the same

Here, 'RoundUp Ready' crops - resistant to Monsanto's proprietary herbicide based on glyphosate - were rapidly adopted because they provided farmers a "simple, flexible, and forgiving weed management system", as Charles Benbrook reports in 'Impacts of genetically engineered crops on pesticide use in the US - the first sixteen years'.

As a result, herbicide use increased in the US by an estimated 239 million kilograms between 1996-2011, "with HR [herbicide resistant] soybeans accounting for 70% of the total increase across the three HR crops". That is, soya, maize, and oilseed rape/canola. "Rising reliance on glyphosate accounted for most of this increase."

Gradually news of the appearance of several different kinds of weed resistant to glyphosate began to emerge, increasing year on year until now some 20-25 million hectares may be affected.

The response has been to use older and more toxic herbicides such as 2,4-D in tank mixes of agrottoxics and to develop new 'stacked' GM seeds with several traits for resistance to different herbicides.

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Why should Europe want to repeat the experience?

Faced with this accumulating evidence of severe harm, Europe has been wise to resist the pressure to adopt GM crops for cultivation except for a GM maize mainly grown in Spain.

In the face of the evidence from countries with experience of these crops, and their associated cocktails of agrotoxics, why should Europe be forced to consider another GM crop for cultivation?

But Europe should go further. The soya boom is driven by markets for animal feed, in the form of soya meal or cake, and biodiesel from soya oil. Vast quantities of both are imported into Europe, making it a major driver of South America's unfolding GM disaster.

The EU should surely stop importing GM animal feeds and oils from North and South America.

Europe: for a rich and varied GM-free agriculture

Indeed Europe should change its whole approach to livestock and crop production to address human health impacts, biodiversity loss and climate change.

Far from being a "museum of world farming" as the UK's current environment minister, Owen Paterson, likes to claim, Europe could show the way to a rich and varied GM free agriculture that provides nutritious, healthy food and jobs.

It would at the same time address the profound degradation of soils and accelerating biodiversity loss, caused to a great extent by the industrial model of agriculture to which genetically engineered crops belong.

Helena Paul has worked for 25 years on issues including indigenous peoples' rights and tropical forests; oil exploitation in the tropics; biodiversity, including agricultural biodiversity; patents on life and genetic engineering (GE); and corporate power. She helped co-found GM Freeze and Genetic Engineering Network in 1999 and has been chair of the former ever since.

She has co-authored a number of papers on agriculture, climate change and biodiversity, and the book *Hungry Corporations: Transnational Biotech Companies Colonise the Food Chain* (Helena Paul and Ricarda Steinbrecher, Zed Books 2003).

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Fonte:
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