

Genetically Modified Organisms —Who Decides?

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Have we missed something? Were we sleeping through the public debate on the pros and cons of corn engineered to withstand Round-Up Ready® herbicide? Do you remember any big demand by consumers for the “flavorsavor”— a tomato that could have the anti-freeze qualities found in the blood of flounders? Surely we would have noticed if Congress passed a law giving some big corporation the right to alter and patent all life on this planet.

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are created when scientists take the DNA from one species and splice it into the DNA of another life form. This is completely different from the plant breeding that farmers and seed savers have done for millennia, where qualities in a particular crop are selected by saving seed from those plants that exhibit the desired traits. Over time, a farmer can breed in qualities, such as larger size, a different color, and heat tolerance, and create a new variety of that plant species. Except for a few bacteria, the transfer of traits from one species to another never occurs in nature. Flounder genes in a tomato? Nature does not let that happen.

WHO IS MAKING THESE DECISIONS?

Multinational corporations are pushing these “Frankenfoods” down the throats of people everywhere. Global protests from South America to the European Union pit small farmers and the concerned consumer against these giant corporations and their enforcement mechanisms, the WTO, FTAA, and other trade agreements.

We have had no say in the matter. Important decisions involving creation and ownership of life itself have had no public input. They are made in private boardrooms, and the issues discussed are profits and corporate growth. Citizens are reduced to consumers and told to vote with their pocketbooks. But the corporations have fought labeling, making pocketbook choices impossible. More importantly, GMOs cannot be an issue of markets and consumer choice. Once they spread, we all have them, like it or not.

WHO SHOULD BE MAKING THESE DECISIONS?

The United States lags behind the rest of the world in taking action against GMO crops, but even here people are starting to organize. In California, for example, voters are currently engaged in efforts to place an initiative on the ballot (the first of its kind in the nation) that will



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create a “Prohibition on the Propagation, Cultivation, Raising and Growing of Genetically Modified Organisms in Mendocino County.”

WHY DO PEOPLE FEEL THEY NEED TO TAKE ACTION?

The pollen from open-pollinated GMO crops can be carried by wind, bees, moths, birds and mice to cross-pollinate with other related plants. Pollen does not respect borders or property lines, nor does it know to stay away from organic farms, non-GMO farms and backyard gardens. This genetic pollution makes an organic farmer’s crop non-organic, and it exposes the farmer to lawsuits by the corporation who owns the patent on the GMO crop because now the organic farmer is growing a GMO crop. Adding insult to injury, not only is the farmer’s organic crop ruined and his income destroyed, but he must pay the polluting corporation for the privilege of growing something he never wanted in the first place.

WHO MADE THESE RULES?

GMO crops also destroy the environment. Once they are released, there is no turning back. Monsanto Corporation’s Round-Up Ready® crops can pollinate related weeds and native plants, creating “super weeds” that cannot be killed with Round-Up. Companies are also genetically modifying fish. Genetically modified salmon can have serious deformities and breed with native salmon, polluting the species’ gene pool forever and reducing native stocks.

Whatever happened to the Precautionary Principle? (The Precautionary Principle states when an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully understood.) Shouldn’t we be certain something is safe before we turn it loose on the whole world?

Corporate claims that the GMOs are needed to feed the world have proven false. The crops developed by the GMO corporations have all been aimed at fattening-up the bottom-line instead of starving children. Even the much-touted “Golden Rice,” which has been genetically altered to triple Vitamin A content in rice grains, holds little promise. In order to gain the benefits of this increased Vitamin A, a person must have other nutrients present, ones that are not available in the diets of people who need it most. World hunger and vitamin deficiencies will not be solved by giving corporations more control of the global food system, but rather by bringing economic opportunity, social justice and food independence to those in need.

Farmers who elect to grow GMO crops are required to pay to lease seeds, instead of saving their own seed as they have for thousands of years. Yes, it is illegal to save GMO