

## Agbiotech Aggression

### Quote of the Month:

"Genetically modified food is viewed as unsafe by most [Americans], and the public wants warning labels on food, a new ABCNEWS.com poll finds... 52% believe such foods are unsafe, and an additional 13% are unsure about them...93% say the federal government should require labels on food saying whether it's been genetically modified ... 57% also say they'd be less likely to buy foods labeled as genetically modified... The image problem of genetically modified food is underscored by contrast to organic foods. While only five percent of Americans say they'd be more likely to buy a food labeled as genetically modified, 52 percent say they'd be more likely to buy food that's labeled as having been raised organically." <www.ABCNEWS.com> 6/20/01

### Attack of the Gene Giants

The global controversy over genetically engineered foods and crops has intensified. Sensing that they are losing the battle for the hearts and minds of the public, even in the US and Canada, Agbiotech interests, large food corporations, and their allies in government have stepped up their propaganda and intimidation campaign. Since the beginning of 2001 an unprecedented number of editorial, opinion, and news stories have appeared in the world press, extolling the virtues of agricultural biotechnology while denouncing opponents as know-nothing Luddites. Accompanying this industry media barrage, choreographed by leading public relations firms, are a number of other recent noteworthy aggressions:

\* In Canada, Loblaw's, Sobey's, Safeway, A&P, and other large grocery chains have banned the use of "GMO-free" food labels. Natural food companies marketing organic and other foods certified as free of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have been ordered by Loblaw's and other chains to block out or remove "GMO-free" labels or else their products will be taken off supermarket shelves. Despite polls that show 90% of Canadians support labeling GMOs, government regulators, pressured by the US and the biotech lobby, have thus far ruled out mandatory labeling. But a new GMO food labeling law has been introduced into Parliament, supported by 80 public interest groups.

\* In 1994 Monsanto and state agriculture officials in the United States launched a similar intimidation campaign against several thousand dairies and health food stores in the US attempting to label or advertise their dairy products as free of recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH). To this date, Monsanto's "no labeling" intimidation campaign has been quite successful. Less than 10% of US dairy products today are labeled as "rBGH-free" even though the overwhelming majority (90%) US dairy cows are not being injected with the drug. Most of America's 1500

dairies, backed by food giants such as Kraft/Phillip Morris, have collaborated in denying consumers free choice by co-mingling rBGH-tainted milk with regular milk and then deliberately lying to consumers about the presence of the hormone ("we don't know") in their company's products. rBGH is banned in every industrialized country except for the USA, primarily because of scientific concerns that it is a cancer hazard and likely to cause increased antibiotic residues in milk. Voting with their pocketbooks against rBGH, millions of US consumers have turned to organic milk and dairy products as well as rBGH-free labeled brands.

\* Reports of genetic pollution and genetic drift continue to proliferate. According to a CBC (Canada) radio broadcast (6/2/01); genetically engineered canola plants are showing up in farmers' fields all across the Canadian prairie, even though many of them have never planted GE seeds. Martin Phillipson, a University of Saskatchewan law professor, said that Monsanto may be liable for damages if their gene-altered, herbicide resistant canola continues to spread. "The GM canola has, in fact, spread much more rapidly than we thought it would," said Martin Entz, a plant scientist at the University of Manitoba. "It's absolutely impossible to control."

\* Similar genetic pollution has been reported in the US by farmers growing organic corn and certified "GMO-free" soybeans. US trade representatives, working hard to engender a growing sense of fatalism regarding the "impossibility" of growing "GE-free" soybeans, corn, and canola, have told EU bureaucrats that it is unreasonable and "unworkable" to expect anything less than 5% genetic contamination in non-GMO grain exports. (Financial Times 6/20/01)

But well-known critics such as Jeremy Rifkin point out that the biotech industry's genetic pollution is creating a backlash. "They're hoping there's enough contamination so that it's a fait accompli... But the liability will kill them. We're going to see lawsuits across the Farm Belt as conventional farmers and organic farmers find that their product is contaminated." (New York Times June 13, 2001).

\* The US government has warned EU officials that their proposed mandatory labeling and traceability requirements for genetically engineered grains and foods violate World Trade Organization rules mandating free trade and could subject EU countries to major WTO sanctions and fines. (Reuters 6/1/01) In a 5/18/01 letter to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the Grocery Manufacturers of America, and 17 other farm and commodity giants warned the EU's proposed regulations threaten "a \$4 billion US agricultural export market."

\* The White House and the biotech industry continue to pressure Brazil to approve Monsanto's Roundup Ready soybeans for commercialization. Because of their ban on GE soybeans the Brazilians have captured an increasing share of the EU and Asian export market -while US market share has declined. "We are very hopeful that last domino will fall," said Bob Callanan of the

American Soybean Association. "That's why the environmentalists are putting up a stink down there in Brazil. They know if that goes, it's all gone." (New York Times 6/11/01) According to USDA figures (PS&D database) US soy exports to the EU during the 1995-2000 period declined 14.3%, while Brazilian exports increased 10.7%.

\* The Bush administration announced 6/13 that studies carried out by the Centers for Disease Control found "no evidence" that Aventis' genetically engineered StarLink corn has caused allergic reactions in humans. Last fall, revelations that StarLink corn, banned by the EPA for human consumption, had contaminated over 300 brand name food products, caused a massive billion-dollar recall and disrupted overseas grain markets. Further recalls were announced July 5 as StarLink corn was detected in white corn tortilla chips. US critics from the Genetically Engineered Food Alert <gefoodalert.org> coalition immediately denounced the CDC findings as inadequate and unscientific. Among serious problems with the CDC tests: a tiny and insignificant sample of human blood serum was tested, too small to be representative of the potentially affected population; the Cry9c protein studied for allergenicity was a synthetic lab construct rather than the actual gene-altered protein as expressed in the corn plant; and special risks to infants, children, mill workers, and farm workers were not taken into consideration. For a scientific critique of the StarLink whitewash see (www.purefood.org/gefood/fdaallergyscandal.cfm)

\* Reuters reported 6/25 that Sri Lanka was being pushed by the US to reverse its ban on genetically engineered foods. Responding to intense pressure, Sri Lanka officials announced a temporary suspension of their ban, but emphasized that the ban would likely be reimposed Sept. 1. "We know of no credible scientific evidence justifying Sri Lanka's ban. We believe it is totally unwarranted," Weyland Beeghly, agricultural counselor of the U.S. Embassy in neighboring India, told a news conference in Sri Lanka May 10. Informed sources report similar strong-arm tactics being employed by American diplomats and trade bureaucrats throughout the Asia and Pacific region (and across the world)-where mandatory labeling and production or import bans on GMOs are steadily gaining momentum.

\* Cropchoice.com reported 5/21 that Monsanto has continued suing "hundreds" of US farmers for "patent infringement," for the "crime" of having genetically engineered plants growing on their property without paying royalty payments to Monsanto. Several farmers being sued by Monsanto are fighting back however, filing counter-lawsuits in North Dakota and Illinois, claiming that Monsanto is deliberately causing genetic pollution, and then turning around and suing innocent farmers who are victims of this genetic trespass.

\* Congressman George Nethercutt, a Republican from Washington state, detailed plans 6/20 for a full-out legal assault on so-called "eco-terrorism," including a federal bill that would convey "mandatory prison sentences for violence against environmental and life-sciences research." The bill comes in the wake of over 45 acts of crop destruction or sabotage carried out over the past two years by American activists against genetically engineered food crops, trees, and animals. Although no one has been injured in these "decontamination" actions, the biotech industry worries that direct action and crop sabotage will become more widespread. Over the past 60 days anti-GE direct actions and sabotage have been reported in Idaho, California, Washington, Oregon, Belgium, France, UK, and the Netherlands.

\* More Agbiotech Aggression. Monsanto and Aventis recently blocked citizens' rights to find out the locations where genetically engineered field crops are being tested in Australia (Sydney Morning Herald, 6/22/01). In a similar move Monsanto threatened July 3 to sue authorities in France for releasing the location of secret GE test sites.

\* Meanwhile on the "right-to-know" labeling front, Trader Joe's, Price Chopper, Hy-Vee and other regional supermarket chains are informing US consumers that it is not possible to tell them which of their products contain GMOs-even as these grocers see an increasing demand for organic and GMO-free foods and beverages. (www.organicts.com)

\* Starbucks, the world's largest coffee chain, under increasing pressure from the Organic Consumers Association, as well as activist groups in Canada, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand, still is refusing to state publicly that they will never purchase GE coffee beans. Starbucks also refuses to state that they will remove rBGH and other GE ingredients from their beverages and foods. The transnational coffee giant maintains they are conducting "market research" regarding the availability and prices of GMO-free milk, baked goods, and chocolate, and claim they will start brewing Fair Trade shade-grown coffee on an "ongoing" basis. On June 25-26, the Organic Consumers Association mobilized protesters to leaflet Starbucks cafes in over 200 cities and five nations (US, Canada, New Zealand, UK, and Australia). For a Starbucks campaign update see <www.purefood.org/starbucks/>

\* Switzerland government bureaucrats in mid-June rejected a national GMO moratorium, despite receiving 300,000 post cards from Swiss consumers, and despite polls indicating that the overwhelming majority of the population is against GE foods.

\* A small Quebec brewery has won a court battle with a federal agency over its right to label its beer as containing no GMOs. Unibroue, based in Chambly, Que., obtained a certificate a year ago from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, classifying its beers as GMO-free. The classification was intended to help the firm's European exports, but was challenged by pro-biotech government officials in the CFIA. (Canadian Press service 6/15/01).

## Global Grassroots & Regulatory Response

Despite the ongoing global offensive by the Gene Giants, anti-GE and pro-organic forces continue to gain strength on all fronts, including public opinion, marketplace dynamics, and legislation.

\* In North America, biotech proponents were dismayed by a 6/20/01 ABC News poll which, among other trends, found that 62% of American women now believe that genetically engineered foods are "unsafe." The ABC News poll, as well as recent polls in Canada, shows that North Americans are slowly but surely catching up to their counterparts in Europe and Asia-where 70-80% of consumers remain firmly opposed to "Frankenfoods." As ABC News put it, "Barely more than a third of the public believes that genetically modified foods are safe to eat." Another poll (6/26/01) conducted by the Pew Charitable Trust, underlines the fundamental problem that the gene engineers face: the more that Americans hear about genetically engineered foods, the more concerned they become. More than half of Pew respondents (55%) reported they had heard a 'great deal' or 'some' about genetically modified foods sold in grocery stores, up from 44%

just six months earlier, and many lack confidence in the government's ability to manage gene-altered foods, following last fall's recall of products contaminated with Starlink corn. The poll also found that consumers are paying more attention to media coverage of the potential hazards of GE foods as opposed to their supposed benefits. In other words the more Americans hear about genetically engineered foods, the less they like them, despite a \$50 million dollar a year propaganda campaign launched by the biotech industry two years ago.

\* U.S. exports of co-mingled or genetically engineered crops are facing major restrictions in foreign markets, according to a new report by the General Accounting Office, the research arm of the US Congress. In the wake of losing several billion dollars in GE-tainted corn, soy, and canola exports, US and Canada agro-exporters can expect even more losses as European, Asian, and other governments adopt the "precautionary principle" requiring pre-market safety testing, labeling, and segregation of genetically engineered crops.

Since biotech crops came on the market in 1996, US farm exports have fallen from \$60 billion a year to \$51 billion—a decline of 15%. The US has lost \$400 million a year in corn exports to the EU, while Canada has lost a similar amount in canola exports. Bernard Marantelli, a spokesperson for Monsanto UK, admitted April 18 that GE canola acreage in Canada this year "went down... a significant amount."

A similar pattern is emerging in soybeans, with US GE soya essentially being boycotted by major companies in Europe, Japan, Korea, and other nations. Over the past year major EU food corporations and fast food chains have also begun to remove all GE corn and soya from their animal feed. Already 25% of all EU animal feed is now GE-free. Meanwhile exports of GE-free grains from Brazil, Australia, India, and China are expanding. Sources in the EU feed industry say the present demand for certified non-GMO soybean meal has grown from nearly zero to 25% in only 12 months, with the expectation of further increases in the coming year. (AgJournal UK 5/30/01)

\* Japanese food manufacturers carried out three major recalls of snack foods in May and June after finding traces of Monsanto's genetically engineered NewLeaf potatoes in the products. Facing global opposition to their GE spuds, Monsanto announced earlier this year that they were pulling NewLeaf potatoes off the market.

\* In a related development, Monsanto announced that its Roundup Ready soybeans would not be available for planting in Canada in 2001. Canada has begun to supply increasing amounts of non-GE soybeans to Japan. (5/18/01 GAIN Report #CA1075 Canada Oilseeds and Products) Four other GE crops have also been removed from the Canadian market this year, GM flax - "Triffid"; GM canola - "Quest"; GM potato - "NatureMark"/"NewLeaf"; and GM corn—"StarLink." <www.gmfoodnews.com/>

\* BridgeNews reported (6/3/01) that South Korea's sole food-grade corn buying group, Korea Corn Processing Industrial Association (KOCOPIA), is requesting international trading houses to stop supplying the nation with US corn. The move follows last week's discovery by local authorities of StarLink corn contamination in corn starch production, a KOCOPIA official told BridgeNews.

\* As the General Accounting Office report indicates, the US is becoming increasingly isolated in international negotiations such as the Biosafety Protocol and the Codex Alimentarius of the World Trade Organization—facing increasing pressure from both the global North and South for precautionary measures regarding GMOs. Thirty-five nations, representing a billion people, are now involved in the process of setting mandatory labeling requirements for genetically engineered foods. In mid-July the Codex is expected to tell the US that its "no pre-market safety testing" and "substantial equivalence" doctrines on GMOs are not acceptable. (7/2/01-Financial Times) For a report on present and pending GMO legislation across the world see <www.purefood.org/gefood/updatethirdworld.cfm>

\*A thousand protesters took to the streets in San Diego, CA June 25-26, challenging industry leaders gathered for the annual Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) convention. The street protests, preceded by three days of "BioDevastation" teach-ins and workshops, generated extensive media coverage across North America, along with a near hysterical response from the Biotech Establishment. <www.biodev.org>

In a press release dated June 22, the agribusiness and biotech front group, American Council on Science and Health, stated:

"Caveat Emptor. Consumers and journalists beware. Biodevastation activists aim to target you over the next few days with false and misleading information about food safety, nutrition and the environment. The same people who brought you a long list of other false health and environmental scares—including the infamous Alar in apples scare, the Dow-Corning breast implant campaign—and dozens of other debunked fears are at it again. This time the scaremongers are targeting such safe foods as milk and other dairy products in your local supermarket and at food retail outlets such as Starbucks."

\*In one San Diego protest 6/24, activists from the Ruckus Society unfurled a giant 1500 square-foot banner in front of the Convention Hall, which read "Biotech Perverts—Get Out of Our Genes". "There are thousands of biotech industry representatives coming to town, who are perverting agriculture, science, nature and democracy as we know it. These perversions impact human health and the well-being of all life." stated Shannon Service, a Biodevastation protest leader.

\* On June 26 several hundred protestors in San Diego and Ocean Beach rallied against Starbucks, calling on the company to ban GE food and beverage ingredients and to brew Fair Trade, shade-grown coffee on a weekly basis. Ocean Beach residents are trying to stop a Starbucks café from locating in their neighborhood, pointing out that Starbucks has now become the "Wal-Mart of American coffee shops," routinely moving into neighborhoods and putting local independent coffee shops out of business.

\* A North American seafood importer, Martin International Corporation, is calling on the major seafood companies to take up arms against attempts to develop genetically modified salmon. If not, seafood consumption may decline, he says. "It is my opinion that the US consumer would embrace genetically engineered salmon about as enthusiastically as they would allow a nuclear power plant to be erected in their back yard. If anything, the American public is looking to find out more about the products that they assume to be wholesome, safe and environmentally sound and more and more are leaning to 'natural' or certified organic to be sure of what they are receiving." Richard

C. Martin Jr. (Quoted in IntraFish, a fish industry publication, 5/22/01). In the US the Center for Food Safety and the Genetically Engineered Food Alert have launched a legal petition to keep GE Frankenfish off the market. See ([www.foodsafetynow.org](http://www.foodsafetynow.org))

\* Reuters (6/22/01) reports that the Gene Giants were openly criticized in front of international farm leaders at the World Agricultural Forum in St. Louis. "A steadily shrinking number of companies are gaining unprecedented control over all aspects of commercial food, farming and health," said Rural Advancement Foundation International research director Hope Shand. Shand pointed out that Monsanto seeds account for 94% of the total area planted in commercial genetically engineered crops, worldwide. Rounding out Shand's list of "gene giants" are DuPont Co., Syngenta Crop Protection Inc., Aventis CropScience and Dow AgroSciences LLC. Shand said aggressive moves by the big Agbiotech firms for greater control of their GM seed creations must be combated if world hunger and poverty problems are to be addressed.

\* Over the past 60 days public interest activists in a number of countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Mexico, and Peru have denounced the US for "dumping" GE soya and corn in food aid shipments and grain exports. Biotech industry spokespersons have responded that denunciations of GMOs in food aid shipments are proof that anti-GE campaigners such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth are willing to let the hungry masses in the Third World starve.

But as noted author and hunger expert Frances Moore Lappe pointed out in the Los Angeles Times (7/1/01): "Government institutions are becoming ever more beholden to... corporations [rather] than to their citizens. Nowhere is this more obvious than in decisions regarding biotechnology—whether it's the approval or patenting of biotech seeds and foods without public input or the rejection of mandatory labeling of biotech foods despite broad public demand for it. Hunger is not caused by a scarcity of food but by a scarcity of democracy. Thus it can never be solved by new technologies, even if they were to be proved 'safe.' It can only be solved as citizens build democracies in which government is accountable to them, not private corporate entities."

\* Activists barricaded the offices of the Novartis biotech corporation in a suburb of Minneapolis on 6/25, in solidarity with the Biodevastation protests in San Diego. Police were forced to break down the doors and arrest the protesters. On 5/14 a group of 50 Southeast RAGE (Resistance Against Genetic Engineering) activists in Greensboro, NC were harassed (and three arrested) by police as they staged a symbolic "crop decontamination" exercise outside the Agbiotech company Syngenta's offices in North Carolina. Fifty biohazard "technicians" quarantined a cardboard "garden" of genetically altered mutant corn, which was then removed by a giant puppet, Father Earth.

\* The biotech industry is alarmed by a proposed ballot initiative in Denver, Colorado, next November which will give voters a chance to vote on whether genetically engineered foods should be served in area schools, given that these foods have not been proven to be safe. After a heated debate in the media over several weeks the Denver Post published an editorial June 1 calling for mandatory labeling of all genetically engineered foods.

([www.non-gmosource.com](http://www.non-gmosource.com)) The success of the Denver effort in raising the level of debate over Frankenfoods in Colorado has inspired the Organic Consumers Association and a number of Green Party activists to discuss joining efforts with local activists (and national networks such as the Campaign to Label Genetically Engineered Foods) to get city council resolutions and initiatives on the ballot all across the US. State ballot initiatives on GE foods are also underway in Washington, Oregon, and other states. ([www.washingtonrighttoknow.com](http://www.washingtonrighttoknow.com)) ([www.labelgefoods.org](http://www.labelgefoods.org)) ([www.safefood.org](http://www.safefood.org)) and [www.thecampaign.org](http://www.thecampaign.org)

### What's Next in the Frankenfoods Fight?

Despite industry efforts to create a false sense of fatalism, to convince people that Frankencrops are spreading everywhere and cross-pollinating everything, even organic crops, so therefore there's no possibility of resisting them, the global consumer and farmers movement against genetically engineered foods continues to grow and expand.

Although US and Canadian corporations such as Loblaw's, Starbucks, and Trader Joe's are under tremendous pressure by their partners in the food and biotech industry to "hold the line," and not cave in to consumer and activist demands, the pressure coming from the grassroots against these and other food and beverage corporations will undoubtedly increase over the coming months.

Similarly, although the Bush administration, Monsanto, and the Gene Giants are trying harder than ever to pressure governments around the world to import and allow cultivation of GE crops inside their borders, very few are taking up their offer. Three nations continue to produce almost 99% of all GE crops—the US (74%), Argentina (15%), and Canada (10%)—and the export markets for these countries' crops are growing smaller, not larger, month-by-month.

On the regulatory front, the US and the Gene Giants appear increasingly isolated in their "no safety testing" and "no labeling" position. A growing number of scientists around the world now believe that the gene-splicing process itself is inherently unpredictable and haphazard, and that therefore proving that gene-altered foods are safe for human health and the environment will be extremely difficult, if not impossible. For a detailed scientific and legal critique of the US government's no labeling and safety testing policy see ([www.purefood.org/gefood/fdasued.cfm](http://www.purefood.org/gefood/fdasued.cfm))

Similarly on the labeling front, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Bush administration and the Agbiotech lobby to override the will of 90% of world's consumers who are demanding mandatory labeling of genetically engineered foods—mainly so that they can avoid buying them. As Norman Braksick, the president of Asgrow Seed Co. (now owned by Monsanto) predicted in the Kansas City Star (3/7/94) seven years ago, "If you put a label on a genetically engineered food, you might as well put a skull and crossbones on it."

Stay tuned to BioDemocracy News and the website of the Organic Consumers Association [www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org) for further developments.