

The future of farming: Industrial Agriculture and the Growth of GM is adding to the problem of world hunger

Not since the hunger crisis of 1984 in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa has the issue of “feeding the hungry” been so prominent in the global news agenda. In the year between the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Cancun, the already overblown rhetoric claiming that Genetic Engineering (GE) would solve the problem of world hunger has reached even more outrageous proportions. This is particularly true in the United States. Most parts of the US Government, from Congressional legislation on aid to Africa, to the US Trade Representative, to President Bush himself addressing the graduating class of the US Coast Guard Academy have acted as enthusiastic cheerleaders for the GM industry. Yet despite the enthusiasm for high tech solutions to the problems of world hunger, the fundamental truth about food and hunger remains unacknowledged by the GM advocates: people go hungry because they are poor, powerless, both or have no land upon which to grow food. Genetic engineering and GM crops will do nothing to solve these problems, and show every likelihood of making them worse.

Today’s agriculture industry is more like mining than farming. Its system compromises the very earth on which all our future food needs depend. Only about 16% of the world’s farmland remains free of problems such as chemical pollution. Rather than growing food to meet the needs of local communities for a healthy, diverse diet, industrial agriculture produces crops to sell on world markets. This agriculture uses costly farm chemicals and machinery. While world crop production has trebled since the 1950s, more people go hungry now as 20 years ago. Small family farmers are driven off their land and local people cannot afford to buy what is grown. Too often, the result is a downward spiral of environmental destruction, poverty and hunger.

Greenpeace aims to ‘ensure the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity’. That includes human life – and meeting people’s food needs, through sustainable farming practice, is at the heart of our survival. Farming methods that undermine people’s food security affect more than just those who go hungry. They undermine the environment. Forest wilderness and wildlife are destroyed in the search for food and land to farm.

Hunger and poverty go hand-in-hand. Technological ‘solutions’ like GM obscure the real social and environmental problems causing hunger. These issues include who grows our food, how and where it is grown, how it is distributed, and who has access to it. Simple practical changes such as improving rainwater collection can increase harvests dramatically. Basic social measures are also critical. Between 1970 and 1995, provision of basic health care and improvements in women’s status and education were responsible for nearly 75% of reductions in childhood malnutrition.

So how can we reverse the devastation caused by the agriculture industry and ensure that the world can feed itself in the future? The solutions are already evident for those who choose to look. There is a significant – and growing – body of knowledge on sustainable farming practices around the world. Greenpeace has documented projects on millions of farms in more than 50 countries around the world¹. These show the world's poor can feed themselves using cheap, locally-available technologies that will not damage the environment. The findings: **Switching to sustainable farming methods increases harvests for these farmers by an average of 73%.**

Greenpeace works for real solutions. The future for farming lies in recognising its role not only in the production of food, but also in providing us with the clean water, diverse wildlife and plants, and the fertile soil on which all our futures depend.

Solutions lies not in feeding the world but allowing the world to feed itself.

Food security – the ability of a community to feed itself consistently on a diverse diet – is a complex problem that will not be solved overnight: it depends on people having access to land and money. GM provides neither. Not only do GM crops not provide the solution, they also pose a threat of irreversible harm to the environment – the real basis of people's food security. GM technology, and the industrial system it maintains, increases dependence on expensive farm chemicals and single food or commodity crops, denying people a balanced diet and destroying the environment on which we all depend. It increases dependence on the companies that supply the technology and the countries that supply the loans to pay for it. Far from a solution, GM crops extend all the worst practices of industrial agriculture. Perversely, its widespread adoption would lead to more hungry people – not fewer. The time has come to reject the false promise of GM and the agriculture industry and to support the real revolution in farming that meets the many needs of local communities and the environment, restores the land degraded by the agriculture industry, and helps the poor to combat their own poverty and hunger.

¹ Reference here: www.farmingsolutions.org , the real green revolution, recipes against hunger