

August 08

Dear MP,

GM Crops or The Sustainable Transition Farming Solution

We have reached a point where we must decide whether we address the present world food crisis with the vested interest Agri-Business GM option, or look for new Sustainable Food Production options such as demonstrated by the Cuban Model and the Primrose Transition Farming Model. The latter produces excellent quality food very intensively but with minimal fossil fuel inputs and it considerably enhances the natural eco-system. Also this system produces a much higher output of food per hectare than is possible with a monoculture of GM crops.

During the last 6 decades, Agri-Business has been highly supported through the existence of cheap fossil fuel and in Britain, very heavily subsidised. The cost to the Earth has also been massive, first directly through worldwide pollution, destruction of natural eco-systems and large-scale soil degradation. Secondly, indirectly through increased carbon dioxide emissions contributing towards global warming. This has been not only from increased fossil fuel use in diesel, making high-energy, consumptive fertilizers and sprays and the embodied energy of building tractors etc., but also through carbon loss from soils. It is estimated that 50% of the increase in carbon dioxide emissions over the last 100 years has been due to the mechanization and intensification of agricultural systems. The dust bowl in America has lost at least 99% of its organic matter, which has resulted in the carbon content being oxidized and entering the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. For example, soil scientists know that organic matter in soil is highly successful at holding minerals in the soil. This depletion of soil minerals will be an important contributor to the reduction of minerals that has been determined in fresh fruit and vegetables over 5 decades. Thus the real quality of food is affected.

In Third World countries, the introduction of Western Agri-Business practices has seriously reduced food security for the peoples within countries such as Africa. These environments have very extreme climatic conditions and fragile soil structures and so are very vulnerable to high chemical input and mechanized farming systems. The traditional small, sustainable farming units, which often incorporated Agroforestry practices (*productive trees amongst annual and perennial food crops*), provided food for communities and maintained balanced eco-systems. For example the Rift Valley in Kenya, which used to be one of the most beautiful and productive areas in the world, is now predicted to be an ecological disaster in 10-15 years through growing cash crops for the Western supermarkets. Currently, at ever-increasing cost, more food has to be imported into Kenya to feed the population. The export 'cut-flower' industry in Northern Africa is even worse as it is highly reliant on chemicals and vulnerable to a very fluctuated market.

In the approach that we take to address the world food shortages, it is absolutely vital, for the future health of the planet and the survival of the human race and other life forms that we also look for solutions that aim to improve the problems of global warming. This can only possibly be achieved through creating highly productive systems that work with nature. Recently, eminent scientists have stated that they have had to revise estimates as global warming is escalating at an unpredicted fast rate. Now predictions forecast our having no Arctic ice in 5 years' time and a catastrophic global temperature rise of 4⁰C. Even in our 'moderate' British climate, people who work the land can feel large and fast changes occurring in the weather patterns that will make food production increasingly more difficult ie the present monsoon-type conditions that are affecting the corn harvest.

In the Independent 19th June "The Minister says Britain needs GM crops". On page 2 the environment editor highlights the scenario of this approach covering our land with 'green concrete' devoid of most life forms. There is a cry out for the need for scientific evidence to prove that GM crops will be massively detrimental both to the remainder of our Earth's eco-systems and global warming. However, there is absolutely no question that in the last 6 decades, Agri-Business methods have contributed greatly to both of these. Can anyone truly say that the introduction of the GM more extreme Agri-Business practice, which is totally reliant on increasingly powerful, broad-spectrum herbicides that kill all life except the crop, will not be catastrophic to natural eco-systems and eventually to the human race? Just for example, it is predicted that when the bees are gone, the human race could die out within 4 years.

Can we in the West with our 'civilised' mindset say what is best for Third World countries? Should we not be working with these countries, discovering the real priority needs from the people themselves and helping them to become more self-reliant using appropriate technologies and having sustainable farming practices and being able to save their own seeds for planting, which is not possible with GM crops? We need to be consulting with people such as India's Vandana Shiva, eminent scientist and highly respected environmental agriculture expert and Wangari Maathai, the scientist and Nobel Peace Prize winner from Kenya. We should also be asking our children who I'm sure would be undoubtedly relieved and reassured, if they new that we were doing our utmost best at this moment in time, to leave them with a legacy of at least some remains of our precious Earth, with its beautiful, natural eco-systems, rather than 'green, lifeless concrete' that will exacerbate the present global problems at an increasingly faster rate. We will be answerable to them within 5 years.

Enclosed is the insert dealing with 'Growing Sustainable Solutions' from our Marketing Package for the Centre for Sustainable Food. Please read this and try to visualize the way that these Transition Farming practices that have been proved in Cuba and with the Primrose Farm model can be used to provide food in large quantities and of high quality in places where it will be needed and particularly in urban situations in a post-peak oil world. This could create a land where food is grown in healthy balance with nature and actually producing a greater output of food per hectare than is possible with GM cropping.. Various types of this sustainable farming model have been tried and tested over hundreds of years in many countries and the aim is to document the Primrose Transition Farm model and create a plan of the way that this type of system can be brought into full production from a bare field within a 5 year period. Support needs to be invested in these sustainable farming systems, which can also be incorporated into community projects such as the Transition Towns' movement.

Please make a request if you are interested to view a complete marketing package for the Centre for Sustainable Food.

Yours sincerely

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