



Biotech Moratorium

In response to growing consumer pressure in the UK, preparatory talks have begun with a view to a five-year moratorium on the commercial growth of genetically engineered foods.

Farmers, seed companies, the government's wildlife advisers, *Nature*, and biotech food producers, including Monsanto, are all involved.

However, environmentalists see the potential moratorium as a hollow victory. This month, Monsanto was granted one of the most far-reaching injunctions in British history, whereby the direct action group, GenetiX Snowball, was warned that they will be sued for damages done to Monsanto test crop sites by anyone claiming to be affiliated with the organization.

Also, the moratorium does nothing to prevent genetically modified products, in the form of imported foodstuffs, from entering the UK.

As environmental campaigner, George Monbiot, commented on national television news: "Already Monsanto are moving into East European countries that don't have the informed consumers, or regulatory bodies, or campaigners that we have here."

"What is particularly worrying", he added, "is the nightmare scenario where the biotech companies continue to develop these crops whilst working within the WTO to force the consumers of this country and indeed the rest of the EU to accept these foods - whether we like it or not."

A recent Mori poll indicated that 77% of British consumers want genetically modified food to be clearly labelled. Polls worldwide are revealing a similar consensus. Surveys show that 80-95% of consumers in the industrialized world demand the labelling of genetically engineered foods - primarily so that they can avoid buying them.

For a global summary of consumer polls on labelling GE food see <http://www.consumersinternational.org/campaigns/biotech/surveys.htm>

Brazil rejects Monsanto's "Roundup Ready" soybeans

The Federal Court of Brazil has blocked authorization for commercial planting of Monsanto's "Roundup Ready" transgenic soybean.

The soya is genetically engineered to be resistant to Monsanto's "Roundup" herbicide. It would have been the first transgenic product to be planted in Brazil.

"Monsanto had failed to demonstrate that the 'RR' soybeans will not have a negative impact in the Brazilian ecosystems, such as the development of new over-resistant plants," said Marijane Lisboa, a spokesperson for Greenpeace.

New Studies Confirm Biotech Safety Fears

A report published in the journal, *Nature*, reveals that genetically modified weeds have a greater than normal ability to cross-pollinate with other plant species.

Dr Joy Bergelson, a professor of ecology and evolution at the University of Chicago, modified a weed, known scientifically as *Arabidopsis thaliana*, by inserting genetic material that rendered the weed resistant to a common herbicide.

The modified plant, which is normally self-fertilizing, became extremely promiscuous. In fact, Bergelson and colleagues found that it was 20 times more likely to cross-pollinate with wild, unmodified *thaliana* than weeds that had been mutated into herbicide-resistance through more traditional means.

"These results show that genetic engineering can substantially increase the possibility of transgene escape, even in a species considered to be almost completely self-pollinating," the study points out.

Although the scientists do not know why the plant's sexual habits have changed under its new genetic blueprint, they do believe that their findings will have serious consequences, since "this gene has been introduced into dozens of agricultural crops."

"This is a big deal," says Jane Rissler, a senior scientist with the Union of Concerned Scientists, Washington; "the flow of genes from biologically engineered species to wild species could change the genetic diversity and processes of whole ecosystems."

In a separate study, Ohio State University scientist, Allison Snow, found that weeds that have acquired herbicide-resistance from

genetically engineered crops maintain their ability to pass these traits on, rather than becoming less fertile, as some scientists had believed.

Genetically engineered herbicide-resistant plants can only be considered agriculturally useful if the weeds their modification facilitates destroying do not become herbicide-tolerant themselves. Likewise, if pests become resistant to the pesticides exhaled by genetically engineered crops, wherein lies the point of the initial modification? Superweeds and Superbugs will become mankind's unwanted inheritance.

Despite their importance, Bergelson's discoveries changed little in the plans of biotech manufacturers. According to Rob Horsch, vice-president and general manager of the Agracetus Campus of Monsanto; "the possibility of outcrossing has always and will always exist, and none of the regulatory decisions or safety analyses that I'm familiar with depends on arguments about the frequency of cross-pollination itself."

The "Verminator"

Zeneca, the world's 5th largest seed company, has created a genetically modified seed to rival Monsanto's "terminator".

When Delta and Pine Lane and the US Department of Agriculture acquired a patent for a genetically engineered seed that would be incapable of re-germination in its 2nd season, Monsanto was quick to buy up the company - for an enormous \$1.76 billion.

Not to be outdone, Zeneca, the "life" industry spin-off of ICC (Imperial Chemical Industries) has created the "Verminator", a seed containing genetic material from rat fat. The plants could either sterilize on contact with a Zeneca chemical, continue germinating in its second season without its genetically altered trait, or simply fail to reproduce altogether.

Farming and food associations are up in arms over these Terminator technologies, which threaten the livelihoods of farmers across the world. Instead of saving seeds from previous harvests for the following season, farmers will be forced to buy new seeds. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimate that 1.4 billion farmers rely on saved seed for their food security.

Worse still, farmers could find that neighbours have bought terminator seed crops that fertilise and subsequently sterilize their crops as well. Often, subsistence farmers save seed that produces the best harvest for their specific environment. The Terminators could destroy these carefully cultivated varieties, thereby irreversibly damaging both local subsistence farmers and world food security.



FDA drug approvals

Pharmaceutical industry pressure on the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to speed up new drug approvals is yielding results. Between 1996 and 1997 the FDA approved nearly twice as many new drugs as they had done in the previous two years.

This is troubling news to consumer advocates who are concerned about the safety of new drugs.

In the past nine months, three drugs – Duract, Posicor and Redux – were yanked off the market, after reports of deaths and serious injuries. Public Citizen pharmacist Larry Sasich says that the FDA knew of problems with each of the drugs before they were approved.

“Safety questions, when you know about them, should be answered before approval, not after,” said Sasich.

Sasich wants an investigation of the FDA’s approval process for each drug pulled off the market.

“After each airline crash, we investigate to try and make the industry safer. But we don’t do that with drugs.”

Sasich advocates the incorporation of an independent agency into the FDA that could regulate the safety standards of the approval system.

Adapted from an article published by *Corporate Crime Reporter* 3, July 13.

More Water Pollution

Over the past six years, a new class of water pollutant has emerged. Pharmaceutical drugs given to people and domestic animals – including antibiotics, hormones, painkillers, tranquilizers, and chemotherapy chemicals – are being found in surface water, groundwater, tap drinking water and even the oceans. The North Sea, for example, has been estimated to contain 48-96 tons of clofibric acid, a drug that is used to reduce cholesterol levels in the blood.

German scientists report that a typical water sample contains between 30 and 60 drugs. The concentrations of some are comparable to the low parts-per billion levels at which pesticides are typically found. To some people this is reassuring, but others are asking, “What is the long-term effect of drinking, day after day, a dilute cocktail of pesticides, antibiotics, painkillers, tranquilizers and chemotherapy agents?”

Before the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will approve a drug, the manufacturers have to conduct a risk assessment that estimates the concentrations that will be found in the environment. If the risk assessment concludes that the concentration will be less than one part per billion, the drug is assumed to pose acceptable risks. But once approved, no tests have ever been done to see whether those estimations were correct.

When a human or animal ingests a drug, from 50%-90% of it is excreted unchanged. The impact of these residues in combination with other chemicals in the environment has never been researched. Given the plethora of man-made and organic chemicals at large on the Earth, such an

undertaking would be virtually impossible.

It is known, however, that some creatures show a far greater sensitivity to these chemical excretions than humans do. For example, the sexual organs of certain fish are mutated by contact with the female sex hormone, estradiol, at concentrations of 20 parts per trillion – or 1/50th of the one-part-per-billion level.

Scientists also point out that the high quantities of antibiotics in water allow bacteria to build up resistance. Super bugs, such as E-coli, are the inevitable consequence.

Adapted from ‘Drugs in the Water’, *Rachel’s Environment and Health Weekly*, September 3, 1998.

Global Collapse

According to a World Watch Institute report, global biological collapse has begun.

The report reveals that three-fourths of the world’s bird species are declining in population or facing extinction. Amphibians are similarly threatened. In America, nearly one-eighth of the native plant species are in danger of extinction; over 700 of them are likely to disappear in the next ten years. Wetlands – a crucial ecosystem for many species – have been decimated across the industrialized world: in Italy, New Zealand and California, for example, more than 90 per cent of the wetlands have been destroyed.

It is not only wild biodiversity that is being lost. In the past fifteen years, 1,500 local varieties of Indonesian rice have disappeared. Almost three-fourths of the rice grown today descends from a single plant.

However, without immediate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, the effects of global warming will make the current biological collapse pale in comparison. Rapidly rising temperatures will overwhelm many species’ ability to adapt and forests, tundra and coral reefs will disintegrate. Swelling seas will drown the world’s remaining mangroves and other wetlands.

Biological diversity is no luxury: like all organisms, humans are ultimately dependent on others for their well-being. Unfortunately, policy-makers continue to give higher priority to short-term economic concerns than to the need to maintain biodiversity. Only if these priorities are righted can the squandering of our biological inheritance be avoided.

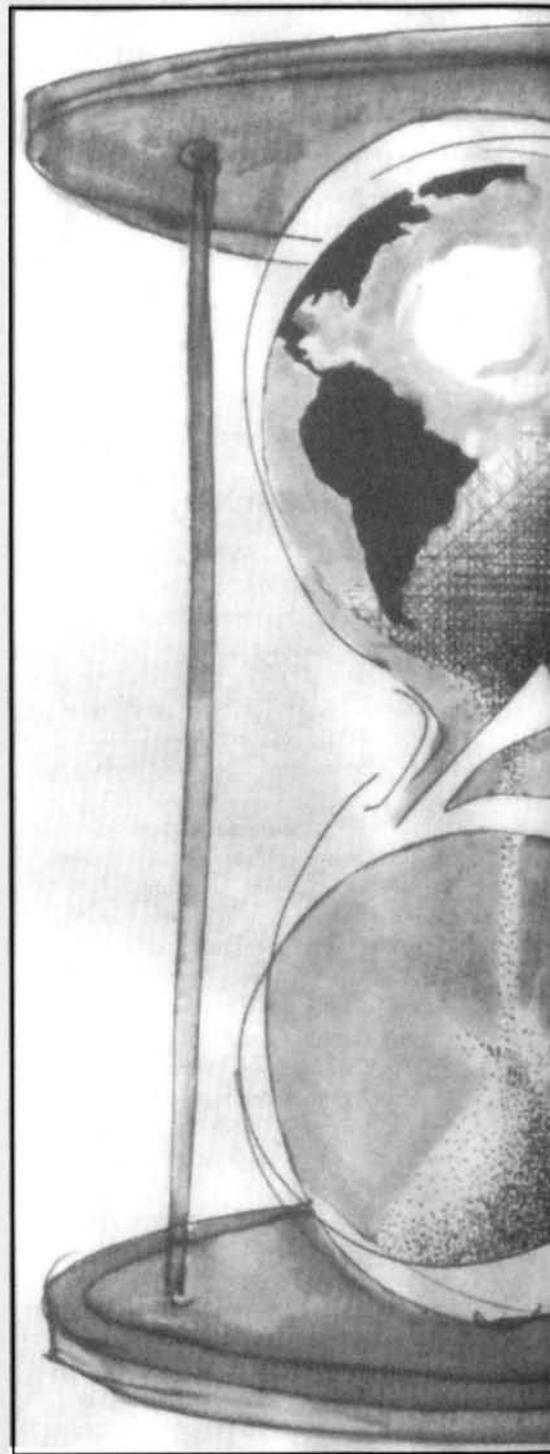
For more information contact Mike Vandeman on mjvande@pacbell.net

Activist Killed

On September 18th, an activist attempting to protect a Californian old-growth forest was killed by a falling redwood that had just been cut by loggers working for Pacific Lumber.

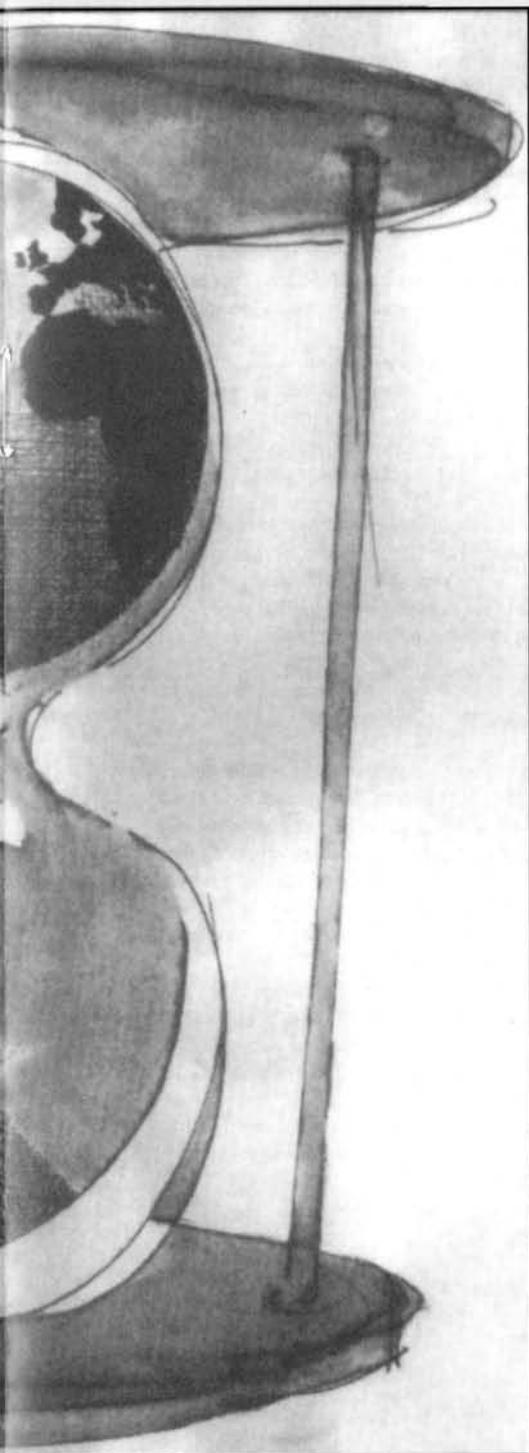
David Chain, 24, was a member of Earth First!, the direct action environmental group. The group hopes to protect the Californian coastal forests – home to trees more than 1,000 years old. The area where Chain was killed is also listed as a sanctuary for the marbled murrelet, a protected sea bird.

When verbal pleas failed to sway the loggers from their work, nine Earth First! activists resorted to ‘cat and mouse’; a strategy of obstruction in



which they place themselves in front of trees that have been marked out to be felled. Normally, the loggers would have been left with little choice but to call it a day, but on this occasion the felling continued – with tragic results.

Although the president of Pacific Lumber, John Campbell, claims that his employees “had not seen the protestors in the area for at least an hour”, Earth First! have a video of the confrontation which they believe will show that the loggers knew that the activists were there. Pacific Lumber has been cited for over 250 violations of the Forest Practices Act in the last three years alone. As one writer pointed out, it is only because state officials refuse to enforce the forestry laws, that Earth First! activists were there in the first place.



Asian Pacific People's Assembly

At last year's Asian Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) meeting in Vancouver, students staging peaceful protests against then-dictator Suharto of Indonesia were attacked by Royal Canadian Mounted Police who sprayed the students with pepper spray.

Canadian President Jean Chretien, dismayed at the possibility that Suharto might avoid the Vancouver economic conference because of the threat of protest, had assured Suharto that no activists would disturb his visit.

Contrary to Canadian law, Suharto's body-

“We’re all in a great big car driving at a brick wall at 100 mph and everybody is arguing over where they want to sit. My point is it doesn’t matter who’s driving. Somebody has got to say, ‘For God’s sake, put the brakes on and turn the wheel.’”

(David Suzuki)

guards were granted permission to carry guns at the conference. However, upon request, they were told that shooting protestors would not be tolerated. Suharto's demand that national television networks be stifled was also refused.

However, the RCMP were instructed to remove all placards and signposts from protestors – an order that puts the Canadian system of democracy and free speech into question. An agreement to allow the students a token protest stand was also violated. The students are now immersed in a costly legal battle with the RCMP.

At this year's APEC meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, representatives from NGOs, environmental groups and social justice bodies will hold parallel meetings to highlight concerns about the economic model of free trade and liberalized investment that APEC promotes. These parallel meetings have been a regular occurrence since 1993.

This year, the Asian Pacific People's Assembly is staging a series of forums and workshops, covering issues such as forests and trade (Nov 11-12), land, food security and agriculture (Nov 11-12) and women against globalization (Nov 8-9). This will lead into a two-day plenary session (Nov 13-14) and People's Assembly (Nov 15) which will try to determine common actions and strategies.

For further information, contact The Secretariat, 57 Lorong Hurau, 59100 Lucky Gardens, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Tel: +604 283 6245, Fax: +604 283 3536 E: appasec@tm.net.my

IMF Quota Set to Increase

In a bid to avert a global financial meltdown, US Congress has approved \$17.9 billion of new funding for the International Monetary Fund.

However, the disastrous impact of IMF-imposed policies on workers' rights, the environment and local economies in debt-riddled countries, provides ample justification for the prevention of such expansion. As Representative Richard Arney of Texas, the House Majority Leader, commented; “the IMF has the Midas touch in reverse – virtually every country it tried to help has become worse off.”

The IMF's preference for high interest-rate loans and fiscal severity in reclaiming those loans, has exacerbated poverty across the world. Debtor nations are forced to make foreign debt service a higher priority than basic human needs. In countries like Mozambique, for example, debt

repayments account for 25% of all export earnings – an arrangement that the IMF claims is sustainable. Yet, according to UN statistics, if Mozambique were allowed to spend half of this money on health-care and education, it would save the lives of 100,000 children a year.

IMF policies promote a form of development that yields quick returns at a heavy cost to the environment. Debtor countries are compelled to export vast quantities of their natural resources in order to earn the hard currency to repay loans. Often environmental deregulation is also demanded.

The IMF endorses the reform of labour laws in order to facilitate mass lay-offs – a policy that has aggravated unemployment and its accompanying hardships in countries like South Korea.

Those that will be most disadvantaged by IMF activities are frequently unaware of or powerless to prevent their initiatives.

If you would like to campaign against the expansion of the IMF quota, please write to Robert Naiman, naimanr@preamble.org Preamble Center for Public Policy, 1737 21st NW, Washington, DC 20009, Tel: 202-265-3263, Fax: 202-265-3647, <http://www.preamble.org/>

Guerrilla Food-labeller Acquitted

A British food protestor, who was arrested for labelling packets of Bachelors Beanfeast with warning stickers reading: “Contaminated with genetically engineered soya” was acquitted this month.

Shannon Coggins, 32, had also planned to distribute leaflets outside the supermarket to inform customers about genetically engineered food.

Police decided to press charges under a law introduced two years ago to prosecute people who attempt to blackmail companies and endanger the public by meddling with food. In court, the prosecution asked her if she had labelled the packets because she felt the contents could be “hazardous for people's health”. Coggins replied, “Yes..”, adding: “I want people to make up their own minds. I want them to have the information to do that.”

Although Bachelors Beanfeast lists the genetically altered contents on its packaging, Coggins pointed out that regular purchasers would be unlikely to check the small print.

The magistrate dismissed the charge because the evidence presented did not persuade him that Coggins had been intending to cause alarm and anxiety amongst the general public.



Votes for Sterilization

Brazilian tribespeople are being threatened with extinction after mass sterilizations were performed in exchange for votes in this month's general elections.

Roland Lavigne, a politician and doctor, cut the fallopian tubes of 63 women from the dwindling Pataxó Ha ha hae tribe himself.

Sterilization, which, for many of the Pataxó is their only available method of birth control, wins politicians between 7 and 25 votes per operation.

The local farmers, or fazendeiros, who have been battling with tribespeople for many years over land, are equally happy about the sterilizations. Their disputes began in the fifties when the fazendeiros started snatching land from the Pataxó's 50,000-hectare estate. The Pataxó people, who have been left with just 2,000 hectares, are fighting for the return of their land. When a tribal leader took the campaign to Brasília, a group of youths attacked him at a bus stop, poured petrol over him and set him alight.

The Brazilian authorities are now investigating the barbaric electoral bribing system.

The scandal has already provoked international outrage. The Washington-based Centre for Justice and International Law is considering reporting Brazil to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

"This is genocide," states Roberto Liebgott, of the Missionary Council for Indigenous Affairs. "It was a deliberate attempt to wipe out an entire tribe."

Liebgott believes Lavigne took advantage of the tribal women's misunderstandings as to the full effects of sterilization. The mass surgeries, which were performed on groups of 3-4 to a bed, have already caused medical complications.

Dr Lavigne is a member of the Right-wing Liberal Front, a party that is supported by many powerful land-owners in the north-east of Brazil.

For further information contact Richard Garside at Survival on survival@gn.apc.org, <http://www.survival.org.uk/>, 11-15 Emerald Street, London WC1N 3QL, UK. Tel + (0) 171 242 1441 Fax: + (0) 171 242 1771

Jubilee 2000

After the Second World War, Germany would only agree to spend 3.5 per cent of its export income on debt repayments. It argued that anything higher would be 'unsustainable'.

Today, the world's creditor nations, including Germany, are demanding that the world's poorest nations spend up to 25% of their export incomes on debt repayment.

The cost of this hypocrisy is devastating. Mozambique now spends \$US107 million every year servicing its debt – \$US6.60 for every Mozambican child, man and woman. In contrast, the country spends only \$US2 per person per year on health and \$US4 on education. Similarly, Ghana spends

an average of US\$4 per person a year on health. In 1996, debt service cost Ghana US\$26 per person.

Zambia's infant mortality rate in 1970 was 106 per 1,000 live births. In 1996 it had worsened to 112 per 1,000. Since 1990 the country has paid a total of \$US4.8 billion in debt service – about one and a half times its total annual economic output.

International loans have become the instruments of neo-slavery. The response from the West is that the debts are legally binding, and that debtor countries have a duty to pay.

But is this fair? During the 1980s President Mobutu of Zaire received \$US8.5 billion in secret loans from Western institutions that knew that the loans were being corruptly diverted. Under what duty are the people of Zaire obliged to repay this debt?

And what about South Africa? The country is labouring under a \$US70 billion debt. Interest payments alone are the second highest expenditure after education. To what extent are black South Africans obliged to repay the loans of an oppressive regime they could not elect?

While the world's debtor nations stagger under the weight of crippling debts, creditor nations pretend to help.

Under their Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Initiative, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund will partly clear a country's debt if the nation agrees to undergo a six-year period of IMF-supervised 'structural adjustment'. Such Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) require the debtor country to liberalize their markets and discard 'luxuries' such as state-funded education.

Yet, liberalization of a fragile economy provides open access for exploitative investors and currency speculators, as well as the destabilizing impact of vagaries in the global market.

And for many debtor countries, debt cancellation makes little difference anyway. In Mozambique, for example, the HIPC programme cleared a \$1.4 billion debt. But Mozambique would never have been able to repay this amount. As Joseph Hanlon from the debt relief campaign Jubilee 2000 argued, "Mozambique would have had more chance of sending a football team to France for the World Cup than paying those debts." So even after this 'debt relief', Mozambique will continue to spend as much on debt service as on health and education combined.

The inadequacy of HIPC is part of the reason why Jubilee 2000, the international campaign for a one-off cancellation of Third World debt, is gathering strength.

If you would like to support this campaign, email the 'Guardian' on <http://reports.guardian.co.uk/debt/petition.html>

Alternatively, contact Dr. Lynette J. Dumble, Co-ordinator, Global Sisterhood Network, Senior Research Fellow, History and Philosophy of Science, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Vic., 3052, Australia <http://www.onelist.com/suscribe.cgi/globalsisterhood>

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