

Europe's Biotech Confusion

A Big Problem for Biotech Industry?

By: Jim Goodman



The US farm press is a segment of the media that most people never see. The glossy magazines tell farmers everything they need to know in order to be successful, efficient and progressive— that is, in constant growth mode. Most have no subscription fees, there are plenty of advertisers to cover costs.

Editorial content is clearly tailored to keeping advertisers happy. By supporting the trend to bigger farms they also support the sale of bigger and more expensive machinery. Labor management articles clue farmers in on how to keep the growing Hispanic agricultural labor force productive. Editorials endorsing Genetically Modified (GM) seed, the associated pesticides and their inherent ability to feed the world are frequent and insistent.

An editorial (*End Europe's Biotech Confusion*) in the June 2015 issue of *The Progressive Farmer* noted that “Every country has the right to make its own determination on biotech crops, but the constant uncertainty surrounding the EU's approval process needs to end.” While he says countries should have the right of self determination, the edi-

tors opinion is painfully clear, –the EU should get over it and embrace Genetically Modified GM seed.

As *The Progressive Farmer* concedes “most Europeans don't want biotech ingredients in the food they eat.”

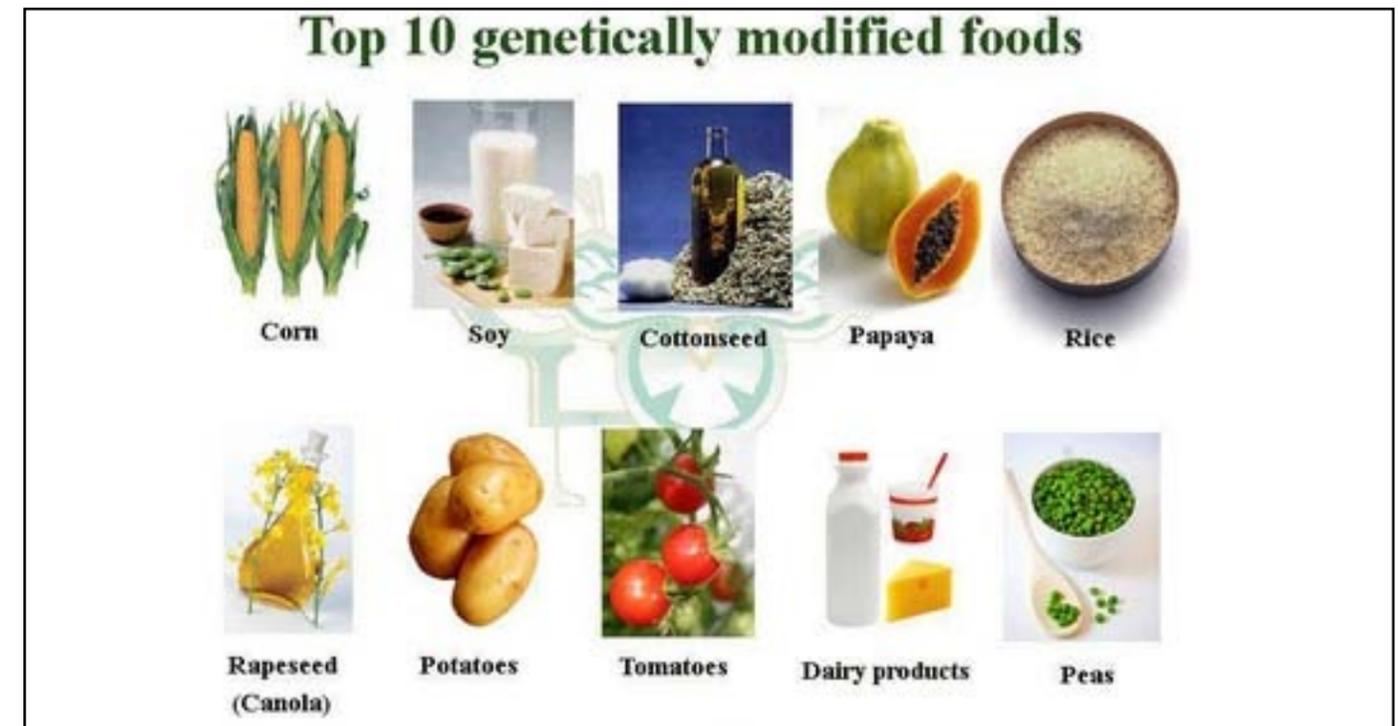
So, why should the EU bow to corporate pressure and accept what the people do not want? If the European Commission or individual countries were to take away the right of European citizens to reject GM food and thus “end the uncertainty”, they would be giving the peoples right, the right to control their food system, to corporate agribusiness interests.

There is uncertainty in the approval process because the European Commission receives a lot of pressure from both pro and anti-biotech camps.

The thousands of food and agribusiness lobbyists, that have set up shop in the European Quarter of Brussels, are well paid by the world's largest biotech seed and chemical companies: Monsanto, Syngenta, BASF, Bayer, Dupont/Pioneer and Dow, to influence EU politics.

On the other side, the citizens of the EU have, with vocal protest, as opposed to cash, made their demands to known to the European Commission. As *The Progressive Farmer* concedes “most Europeans don't want biotech ingredients in the food they eat.”

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In the US, corporations and the government officials they ply with campaign funding, want to eliminate local control if there is any chance it may cut into corporate profit margins. Local control gives citizens too much power. It might be easier and more cost effective, to set up shop in Brussels and work on the EU Parliament, rather than trying to reign-in the governments of 28 separate countries, but from our experience, they will do whatever it takes.

Ron Gray, chairman of The US Grains Council, noted that “The question is simply whether Europe wants to have a functioning, science-based system, or will it allow political pressure to trump everything else?”

Political pressure? Political pressure is apparently OK if applied by agribusiness lobbyists, but not by citizens? He apparently feels that the lobbyists are merely applying pressure to allow innovation to go forward, while citizens, concerned about their children, the environment and their local farmers are maliciously stifling innovation.

Jim Greenwood, CEO of the Biotechnology Industry Organization stated that the ability to commercialize new products depends on “science and risk-based regulation that is both predictable and timely, the world cannot afford innovation to be captive to politics”.

Jim Greenwood wants us to believe that politics should help corporations because, as we know, corporations always have the peoples best interest at heart. He, however, believes that governments should ignore the misguided wishes of the people,— lest innovation, profit and control of the food system might slip out of the hands of corporate agribusiness.

We get that message quite regularly in the US.

While the phrase “Let them eat cake” may never have been uttered in reference to the starving French peasants of the 18th century, the pressure to, “Let them to eat GM” in the 21st century is alive and well in the lobby shops, corporate suites, press offices and political power centers of the world. Those who work to make it happen are well paid.