

Jo Hamilton's statement

3rd August 1999

'We stand now where two roads diverge. But the roads are not equally fair. The road we have been travelling is deceptively easy, a super smooth highway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster. The other fork of the road – the one 'less travelled by' – offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of our earth.' Rachel Carson, author of Silent Spring

I am choosing to pull up AgrEvo's Genetically Engineered (GE) Oilseed rape fully aware that I will break the terms of my injunction which state that I am *restrained from trespassing on this land, uprooting, damaging and/or destroying these plants or other goods belonging to AgrEvo*. I will remove these plants from the field in a peaceful, open and accountable way. My reasons for doing so and breaking my injunction are outlined below, and contained in the open letter to AgrEvo which is attached.

By removing these GE crops I am demonstrating my concerns about the huge amount of power which biotechnology companies such as AgrEvo can wield. I consider the development of GE crops to be detrimental to conventional farmers in this country and around the world, and to those who wish to have some control over the future of food. My concerns are outlined below.

AgrEvo

AgrEvo was formed in 1994, and having taken over Plant Genetic Systems in 1996, is one of the key global players in plant biotechnology¹. AgrEvo's remit is to '*shape directives and research into high yielding agricultural technology*' and '*shortening times between discovery and commercialisation and fuelling the consolidation process ongoing in seed, crop protection and commodity processing industries*'². This amounts to nothing less than corporate capture and exploitation of the food chain. They are attempting to provide a technical fix solution to the very real problems caused by industrial agriculture, which will only exacerbate an already serious situation.

Oilseed rape

This Oilseed rape (OSR) is the same variety grown in the one remaining farm scale trial. This test is not concerned with environmental impacts, its sole purpose being to pass regulations required before entry to the National Seed List. OSR can cross-pollinate readily with wild native flora, hybridisations have already been demonstrated and GE variety can also cross with conventional oilseed rape.

Glufosinate ammonium

This GE OSR is resistant to resistant to AgrEvo's glufosinate ammonium, a broad spectrum herbicide which has been found to be toxic to aquatic life. According to Pesticide News, '*in UK agriculture, relatively small amounts of glufosinate are used...the figures may change dramatically if GE glufosinate resistant crops are commercialised.*' Indeed this could be the main reason behind AgrEvo's GE of OSR, as it '*expects glufosinate to become its linchpin product by 2000*'³. AgrEvo claims that herbicide applications will be reduced, but any reduction in herbicide will be directly attributable to glufosinate's potency. According to Genewatch⁴, any claims of reduced usage of herbicide seem even less convincing when AgrEvo have increased production facilities for glufosinate in the US and Germany and expect sales to increase by \$560m

¹ AgrEvo – Plant Biotechnology Questions and Answers

² AgrEvo's webpage

³ Pesticides News 42, December 1998

⁴ Genetically Engineered Oilseed Rape: Agricultural Saviour or New Form of Pollution? Genewatch briefing no. 2

in the next five to seven years, and that *'rather than making significant reductions in pesticide use, in the long term herbicide resistant crops will intensify chemical dependence in agriculture'*⁵.

The European Union

Hoechst and Schering (the companies behind AgrEvo) are two founder members of Europabio, which is the self styled *'voice of the European biotechnology sector'*, who have ensured that policies promoting the spread of biotechnology are now at the centre of EU growth strategies.⁶ Europabio stresses the vital contributions of biotechnology to future European competitiveness, something which forms centre stage in Trans-Atlantic business dialogues between the US and EU.

Developments such as genetic engineering of food coupled with free trade policies of the World Trade Organisation and the E.U. cannot simply be seen as an inevitable part of 'progress'. If a cliff edge lies at the end of a road, progress is *not* defined as a step forward. I believe we are at that cliff edge and I urge people to take a few steps back to review the road they have taken. The effects of GE and the consolidation of the food chain into the hands of a few, profit driven, multinationals will only be short term progress of a narrow and inherently unsustainable kind for a small minority of people: in effect a kamikaze dive off a high cliff.

As a citizen of one of the most influential countries in the world, I do not like the life we are encouraged to lead. A life where fundamental decisions about how we want to live are placed out of our reach, a life where corporate and profit interests reign supreme, and a life where taking nonviolent action against the state and multinational companies is likened to terrorism in the media. I do not accept the occlusion which takes place to allow the current situation to continue, with the threat of prison and the weight of the law used to scare people into compliance. Biotechnology companies such as AgrEvo and Monsanto are engineering democracy and the legal system to ensure that, whilst they will not be accountable for their actions, a privatised form of justice will be imposed upon me.

I am striving to act with integrity and courage to stop the corporate agenda moving forward, ensnaring the very web of life as it does so. I hope that the effects of my actions do not stop here, and invite other people to continue the broad spectrum of real dialogue and action on GE foods, of which my actions are just one part.

Jo Hamilton

⁵ Pesticides News, 42, Dec 1998

⁶ Europe, Inc – Dangerous Liaisons between EU Institutions and Industry, Corporate Europe Observatory, May 1997