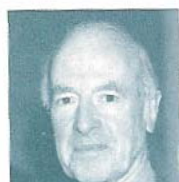


Dialogue

from: Alan Simpson to Lord (Dick) Taverne
from: Lord Taverne to Alan Simpson
subject: **GM Crops**



Alan Simpson is Labour MP for Nottingham South



Lord Taverne is a Liberal Democrat peer. He is chairman of Sense About Science, a charity that promotes an evidence-based approach to scientific issues

From AS to DT – message sent 2.23pm:

If it weren't for the lobbying power of biotech corporations, the case for GM crops would never have got off the ground. The public won't buy them. Supermarkets won't sell them. Agriculture doesn't need them. The insurance industry will not cover them. The health impacts remain uncertain, and the long term and wider consequences of social and economic harm and environmental damage remain largely unexplored.

Apart from this, the case for GM crops obviously has everything going for it. The GM agenda has always been more about owning the food chain than feeding the poor. Sustainable farming is the best way of delivering the latter. GM is just an agenda for the corporate giants.

From DT to AS – message sent 2.40pm:

You take an insular view. Outside the UK, where the 'Frankenfood' scare turned off the public, GM crops are a huge success. They are cultivated on over 80 million hectares, more than three times the area of the UK. More than five million small farmers – *small* farmers, not big companies – in China, India, South Africa, Mexico and Brazil now benefit from growing GM cotton, which has greatly increased their income and improved their health, because of the reduced need to spray pesticides.

And by the way, despite many years of experience of GM crops, there has been no evidence of damage to human health or the environment.

From AS to DT – message sent 3.02pm:

It is difficult to claim small farm benefits when the vast majority of GM crops

are all grown in the US, Canada and Argentina. In developing countries, it is hardly the picture you paint. In South Africa, out of 3000 small farmers who trialled GM cotton, only 700 carried on, with real fears about its viability.

In India, there have been widespread failures of entire GM cotton crops. Small farmers now lead the campaigns against GM crops. Monsanto has been caught dealing with the state government of Andhra Pradesh. In contrast, in China the real benefits seem to be going to non-GM producers. Non-GM soy is selling at twice the price of its GM equivalent... and farmers retain the right to their own seeds.

From DT to AS – message sent 3.50pm:

Alan, where do you get your misinformation? Last year saw an increase of over 20 per cent in the cultivation of GM crops, the biggest ever – most of it in the developing world, particularly India. So keen are Indian farmers to grow GM crops that half the seeds they buy are unauthorised.

South Africa, because of the success of GM cotton, now supports other GM crops as well. Golden rice, crops that can grow in dry or salty regions and plant-based vaccines are examples of GM's huge potential for helping relieve poverty, hunger and disease.

From AS to DT – message sent 4.16pm:

Come on Dick, the stats are from the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA), which your industry funds. In 2004, 95 per cent of GM crops were commodity crops. Half was soya, mainly exported as animal feed



– hardly food for the poor. Golden rice is 'magic-bullet' PR, yet to make it into commercial production. The WHO Vitamin A deficiency elimination programme is a far more sustainable solution.

As for vaccine crops, who insures the consequences of crop vaccines contaminating food crops? GM crops are a scam to give agribusiness control of the food chain. I am happy to be with the ideological dogmatists of the Women's Institute and indigenous peoples in saying that. But here is the challenge. If the industry accepts contamination insurance cover and drops the patenting that removes farmers' rights to save seeds, I'll campaign to let food communities make their own choices.

From DT to AS – message sent 4.58pm:

I am glad your dislike of capitalism has not blinded you entirely to the merits of genetic modification, since you will allow communities to choose for themselves. So not all GM crops are a scam! Incidentally, patent rights to rice designed to help reduce Vitamin A deficiency have been waived, and China is already producing its own versions.

Some time, campaigners against GM crops will have to explain to the developing world why they ignore the opinions of world academies of science about the benefits of GM crops but insist that everyone should accept the opinions of the same academies on global warming.

Finally, you call the GM industry 'my industry'. I have no connection with agribusiness. My concern is to promote an approach based on evidence, not ignorance and scare stories. ■

Postscript

I had my doubts about the last sentence from lord Taverne in this exchange and thought it useful to make a couple of inquiries about the biotech links of Sense About Science.

The profile below on them has come from GM Watch. Draw your own conclusions.

<http://www.gmwatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=151&page=S>

Alan Simpson MP