



THE RAM'S HORN

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The Tyranny of Rights

For a couple of years now, Brewster and I have been having some serious 'pillow talk' about the right to food. As we have debated it, he slowly convinced me that there really is a problem in the tendency for every social and economic justice issue to be couched in the language of rights.

He says, for example, that the farmers' right to save seed is proposed as an exemption to the broad proprietary rights claimed by the corporations who are called Plant Breeders. But saving seed is not a 'right'; it is what farmers do, and have done for millennia, to ensure that their crops continue to adapt to the current needs.

Then there's the right to food, being put forward as the pre-eminent strategy to address hunger. Brewster argues that 'right to food' is an empty bowl, not necessarily containing any food – ie. the right may not be actually fulfilled. He adds that even if it is, "what kind of food would be available or delivered as a result? Would it be healthy, ecologically produced food or would it simply be more of the industrial food that is already supplied by the giant corporations currently dominating the food system? Given the intimate relationship between the corporate food sector and the state, the food that might be made available could simply increase overall dependency on the corporate industrial food system."

He cites many other difficulties with the rights approach. For one, a right must be claimed from an authority who is deemed capable of granting the right. The petitioner is immediately placed in a position of subservience to that authority. This clearly makes

rights demands contradictory to sovereignty: food sovereignty is an assertion of the intention and practice of a people to feed themselves, not a request to someone else for the right to do so.



For Indigenous peoples, this is particularly poignant. In aboriginal languages there is no word for 'rights' as such – it is responsibilities and relationships that are central, contrary to the individualism of rights. They nevertheless find themselves using the rights language as the only way to communicate with an imperial or colonial legal system.

The book looks at how rights became so prominent in our language and thinking. It discusses the creation of the corporation as 'artificial person' and its consequent ability to claim rights such as right to water, or free speech (a.k.a. advertising) which have wriggled their way into international covenants such as NAFTA. It also addresses the ethical aspects of rights, such as the right to life, the right to die, and the right to intervene, as well as property rights, including intellectual

property. (The book is not copyrighted and will be posted for free download on the Ram's Horn website.)

In referring to the dominance of rights as a tyranny, Brewster intends to spark dialogue and debate about the concept of 'rights' and the best ways to achieve genuine justice and equity among people and the Creation we inhabit. We are looking forward to a vigorous discussion!

Copies of *The Tyranny of Rights* may be ordered from The Ram's Horn. **C.K.**

Roundup Kills – weeds, and much more

Roundup has been a top-selling weed killer for a long time. We remember being given a gallon of it to try out – on our Canada thistle problem in some of our pastures – by our provincial ag rep more than twenty years ago (sly company promotion). We used a backpack sprayer to kill individual thistles, and it worked, but we did not like what it did to the soil texture. (That was before we discovered, and adopted, organics.) Now researchers have found that one of Roundup’s inert ingredients can kill human cells, particularly embryonic, placental and umbilical cord cells.

The new findings intensify a debate about so-called “inerts” — the solvents, preservatives, surfactants and other substances that manufacturers add to pesticides – nearly 4,000 of which are approved for use by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Inert ingredients are often even less closely scrutinized than the active toxins advertised; and since specific herbicide formulations are protected as trade secrets, manufacturers aren’t required to publicly disclose them. Regulators simply accept the manufacturer’s classification of all pesticide ingredients that don’t harm pests as ‘inert’. Inert compounds, therefore, aren’t necessarily biologically or toxicologically harmless – they simply don’t kill insects or weeds. Most health studies have accordingly focused on the safety of glyphosate, Roundup’s active ingredient, ignoring its other ingredients both singly and in combination.

In a new study, a team of researchers led by Gilles-Eric Seralini, a molecular biologist at the University of Caen, France, found that Roundup’s inert ingredients amplified the toxic effect of the herbicide on human cells – even at concentrations much more diluted than those used on farms and lawns.

One specific inert ingredient, POEA, a surfactant, or detergent, derived from animal fat, was more deadly to human embryonic, placental and umbilical cord

cells than the herbicide itself.

“This clearly confirms that the [inert ingre-

lients] in Roundup formulations are not inert. Moreover, the proprietary mixtures available on the market could cause cell damage and even death [at the] residual levels” found on Roundup-treated crops, such as soybeans and corn, or lawns and gardens, Seralini reported. The research team suspects that Roundup might cause pregnancy problems by interfering with hormone production, possibly leading to abnormal fetal development, low birth weights or miscarriages. (The research appears in the January issue of the journal *Chemical Research in Toxicology*.)

The EPA, however, considers glyphosate to have low toxicity when used at the recommended doses. The EPA and the USDA both recognize POEA as an inert ingredient and the EPA has concluded that it is not dangerous to public health or the environment. POEA is allowed in products certified organic by the USDA.

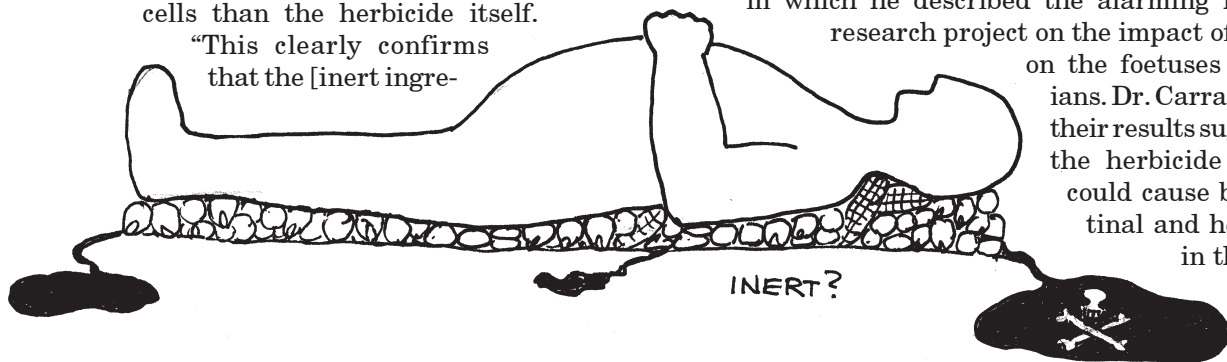
Monsanto scientists argue that cells in Seralini’s study were exposed to unnaturally high levels of the chemicals. “It’s very unlike anything you’d see in real-world exposure. People’s cells are not bathed in these things,” said Donna Farmer, a toxicologist at Monsanto. In fact, Seralini’s team did study multiple concentrations of Roundup. These ranged from the typical agricultural or lawn dose down to concentrations 100,000 times more dilute than the products sold on shelves. The researchers saw cell damage at all concentrations.

– *Environmental Health News*, 22/06/09

A reader commented on the residues left by the practice of using Roundup to dry down crops just before harvest, “I have to wonder what this desiccation is doing to the eventual consumers of that crop.”

Publish and...

Earlier this year, an environmental group petitioned Argentina’s Supreme Court, seeking a temporary ban on glyphosate use after an Argentine scientist and local activists reported a high incidence of birth defects and cancers in people living near crop-spraying areas. In April Andrés Carrasco, an Argentinian embryologist, gave an interview to a leading Buenos Aires newspaper in which he described the alarming results of a research project on the impact of glyphosate on the fetuses of amphibians. Dr. Carrasco said that their results suggested that the herbicide glyphosate could cause brain, intestinal and heart defects in the fetuses.



Carrasco said that the doses of herbicide used in their study were “much lower than the levels used in the [soybean] fumigations”. Indeed, as some weeds have become resistant to glyphosate, many farmers are greatly increasing the concentration of the herbicide. This means, in practice, that the herbicide applied in the fields is between 50 and 1,540 times stronger than that used by Carrasco.

The results in the study are confirming what peasant and indigenous communities – the people most affected by the spraying – have been denouncing for over a decade. The study also has profound consequences for the USA’s anti-narcotics strategy in Colombia, because the planes spray glyphosate, reinforced with additional chemicals, on the coca fields (and the peasants living among them).

Three days after the interview, the Association of Environmental Lawyers filed a petition with the Argentine Supreme Court, calling for a ban on the use and sale of glyphosate until its impact on health and on the environment had been investigated. Five days later the Ministry of Defence banned the planting of soya in its fields. This sparked a strong reaction from the multinational biotechnology companies and their supporters. Fearful that their most famous product, a symbol of the dominant farming model, would be banned, they mounted an unprecedented attack on Carrasco, ridiculing his research and even issuing personal threats. He was accused of inventing his whole investigation, as his results have not yet been peer-reviewed and published in a prestigious scientific journal.

Carrasco was firm in his response: “When one is dealing with a subject of limited public interest, one can keep the study secret until all the last details have been resolved. But when one uncovers facts that are important for public health, one has an obligation to make an effort to publish the results urgently and with maximum publicity.” Even so, he was clearly taken aback by the strength of the reaction. “It was a violent, disproportionate, dirty reaction”, he said. “I hadn’t even discovered anything new, only confirmed conclusions that others had reached. One has to remember, too, that the study originated in contacts with communities that have suffered the impact of agro-chemicals. They are the undeniable proof of the impact.” He is not intimidated: “If I know something, I will not shut my mouth.”

–Seedling, 7/09

More and more

“The expansion of soy means the increased use and concentration of glyphosate. Over time, Round Up herbicide loses its technological battle with evolution and

new weeds develop that are more resistant to the herbicide, explains Javier Souza Casadinho, professor at the University of Buenos Aires. “Producers must use more applications, and in higher doses with higher toxicity – the application has gone from three liters in 1999 to the current dose of 12 liters per hectare,” says Souza.”

–americas.irc-online.org/am/6254

Carry On Regardless

▶ DuPont-Pioneer has received full Canadian regulatory approval of its proprietary herbicide [glyphosate] tolerance trait, Optimum GAT, in corn and soybeans for cultivation, feed, and food. “The Optimum GAT trait combined with our industry-leading genetics and other complementary technologies will help growers maximize yields and allow noticeably cleaner fields through harvest.”

–DuPont press release, 1/9/09

▶ The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has increased the tolerated level of pesticide residue for citrus fruits and oils, following a petition from Dow AgroSciences. The agency said that as a result of the petition from Dow AgroSciences, which produces the insecticide, it has reviewed the available scientific data for methoxyfenozide, and has increased the maximum tolerance level for citrus fruit from two parts per million (ppm) to ten ppm, and the tolerance for citrus oil from 70 to 100ppm. In its final rule, it said that the pesticide is “*not acutely toxic*” and that studies show “it has few or no biologically significant toxic effects at relatively low-dose levels in many animal studies and only mild or no toxic effects at relatively high-dose levels.”

The EPA also *simulated* the effect of higher tolerated levels of the pesticide on drinking and surface water. It said: “There is a *reasonable certainty* that no harm will result from aggregate exposure to the pesticide chemical residue, including all anticipated dietary exposures and all other exposures *for which there is reliable information.*”

–Food production daily, 7/9/09

In the above paragraphs, note the words we have emphasized with italics. We do not find them reassuring! And the fundamental question remains: Why does modern agricultural production require the poisoning of the food for such a wide variety of creatures, including humans?

▶ Monsanto’s strategy is to phase out old varieties for which the patents are soon to run out with newer “improved” varieties under patent, thus keeping – and extending – their grip on the throat of the commercial seed market. This is evidenced by their buy-out of South



Dakota State University crop science department and purchase of WestBred seed, a major US wheat breeder. Monsanto clearly wishes to gain control of wheat worldwide.

Monsanto Company's Chief Financial Officer Carl Casale says that the company is committed to more than doubling gross profit in fiscal year 2012 over its fiscal year 2007 base, with seeds and genomics making up 85 % of the total gross profit mix by that time. Total company gross profit is expected to reach \$6.1 billion to \$6.3 billion in 2010, with seeds and traits gross profit crossing the \$5 billion mark for the first time. The company is also now targeting a gross profit from Roundup and other glyphosate-based products of \$1 billion annually. *— source: Monsanto, 10/9/09*

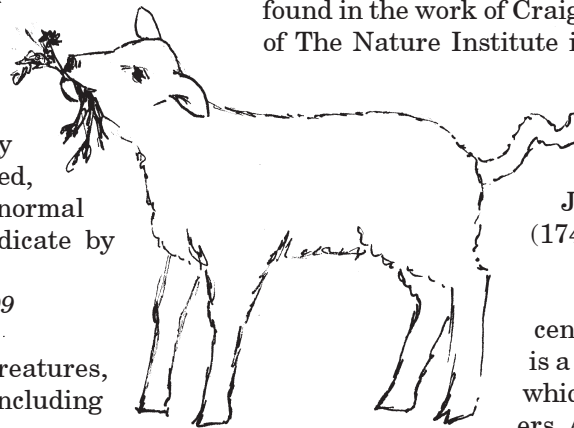
tional Development, echoes the Averys' ideological bias. "Contemporary genetic modification of crop plants is embedded in a history of plant domestication that transformed plants profoundly from their wild origins . . . The late 20th century witnessed a genetic revolution with the invention of recombinant DNA technology, the explosion of genome sequencing and the development of techniques for the introduction of individual genes into microorganisms, plants and animals. It is possible to modify organisms, including crop plants, in extremely precise ways, adding just one or a few genes at a time... There is no evidence of adverse effects on either human or animal health, while substantial environmental benefits have been realized, including decreased use of pesticides and increased adoption of no-till farming." *— Agweek, USA 10/8/09*

Smarter Than They Look

"Lambs with a stomach parasite have been found to eat more food that is low in nutrients but high in antiparasitic tannins than healthy lambs do. After the parasite had cleared, the animals switched back to their normal diet, suggesting that they self-medicate by changing their eating habits."

— New Scientist, 22/8/09

It seems that lambs, like other creatures, need access to a diversity of foods, including grass, legumes, herbs, and weeds.



A more thoughtful and scientific attitude can be found in the work of Craig Holdrege and Steve Talbott of The Nature Institute in New York state, which is devoted to the practice of a holistic, respectful science as developed by the German poet and scientist, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832).

Holdrege and Talbott's recent book *Beyond Biotechnology* is a collection of articles, some of which are more valuable than others. As a whole, however, it is one of the few books I know of that

actually examines the philosophical/ideological assumptions of genetic engineering and puts forward a very different, more respectful and hopeful attitude toward the world we inhabit.

"Mother Nature Is A Bad Person"

Denis Avery and his son Alex, turn out their propaganda under the flag of the Hudson Institute, which got its start in life as an anti-communist Cold War 'think tank'. Now Alex is saying that organic food advocates are like tobacco lobbyists, in that they champion scant evidence for their claims while ignoring decades of proof to the contrary. "Organic activists engaged in an ideological battle are sabotaging the technological advances that are allowing farmers to be more efficient, while at the same time misleading the public about the effects of pesticides. . . . There's a reason why we use pesticides. Because mother nature isn't the tooth fairy. She's a [bad person] who wants to take stuff from us."

— Contra Costa Times 19/8/09

Alarming, Nina Fedoroff, newly appointed science and technology adviser to the US secretary of state and to the administrator of the US Agency for Interna-

"At the heart of the Goethean approach" [to science]," Holdrege writes, "is the realization that as a scientist I must develop new capacities in order to do justice to nature in my work. It is not just a matter of developing new instruments or refining the intellect, but developing new ways of knowing that can illuminate the phenomena in ways that science has largely neglected (or even deemed unscientific). Out of this awareness arises the striving to develop a gentle sensibility that does not violate the phenomena in the process of getting to know them. It's an active conversation, but one in which I hope the other – as something in its own right – can reveal itself."

'Conversation' is the key word in their approach, the assumption being that the phenomena – organism, cell, plant, animal – have something to say to us, and we

can only get to know them when we are prepared to enter into a conversation with them. So they describe responsible traditional breeding as “a way of letting everything change without violating the whole – because it is the organism *as a coherent and healthy whole* that manages the change. Isn't it reasonable to assume that there's a wisdom at work amid all the complexity of the evolved organism that we cannot lay claim to with out largely trial-and-error manipulations?”

Considering the much-touted Golden Rice, genetically engineered to express carotene, the precursor of Vitamin A, they say: “How many genetic engineers have pondered the remarkable fact that rice, despite the myriad varieties that have arisen over thousands of years, never produces carotene in the endosperm of the kernel? The rest of the above-ground plant makes carotene, and the endosperm should (according the prevailing conceptions) have the genes that would allow it to produce carotene. But it never does so. Certainly that should give us pause to consider what we're doing. Might the excess carotene in the seed affect in some way the nourishment and growth of a germinating rice plant? What does it mean to force upon the plant a characteristic it consistently avoids? Can we claim to be acting responsibly when we overpower the plant, coercing a performance from it before we understand the reasons for its natural reticence?”

“The gene is not a thing at all, but a way of ordering and interpreting phenomena. . . . The gene as a robust ‘thing’ is a figment in the materialist mind, a mind that can only conceive the world as governed by mindless material entities that (somehow) carry out meaningful processes. I do not want to suggest that the concept of the gene has no relation to material happenings. But the gene concept was not, in the first place, derived from engagement in the richness of hereditary phenomena. It was a preconceived notion that framed scientists' thinking and action. Experiments were designed with the gene concept in mind, and investigators then interpreted the results in terms of the particular conceptualization of inheritance they presupposed in the first place.”

The Nature Institute also has a website page devoted to the Nontarget Effects of Genetic Manipulation – natureinstitute.org/txt/ch/nontarget.php – with a very clear introduction by Craig Holdrege, who writes, “Nontarget effects are those experimental results that appear in addition to or, in some cases, instead of the target results. . . . An instructive analogy is the common occurrence of drug “side effects.” Here, too, the intended effect of the drug is often accompanied by numerous, sometimes harmful, effects arising from the drug's unanticipated action on nontarget tissues or processes. . . .

“It is simply inaccurate to state that there are no nontarget effects in any given case. Rather, one must say: ‘no nontarget effects were found within the boundaries of the analysis carried out in this case’. If you fish with a wide-meshed

net, you may not catch sardines. In scientific terms, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

“In a sense it is paradoxical that genetic manipulation, which aims to effect discrete, clearly demarcated alterations in organisms, can make us more aware of the dynamic, context-dependent nature of life. Nontarget effects do that. The manipulated organism is a dynamic, active context for the inserted genes and therefore does not simply take in genetic instructions passively and do as it is told. That is why, among the many plants and animals that may have been modified by a genetic experiment, only very few are found that fit the researchers' expectations. In order to be successful, the genetic engineer must circumvent as far as possible the active, adaptive, and changing organism.

“The manipulated organism does not exist in a vacuum. It is critically influenced by its environment and influences it in turn. In this dynamic, changing relation between organism and environment, nontarget effects have further opportunity to make themselves known. So while the genetic engineer wants control, stability, regularity, and constancy, life plays itself out in dynamism, unpredictability, and change. . . .

“Do we truly fathom the consequences of our actions? . . . the array of nontarget effects can alert us to the far-reaching impact we are having on life and to how little we actually know about what we are doing.”

Beyond Biotechnology: The Barren Promise of Genetic Engineering, U. of Kentucky Press, 2008

Spreading Triffid

“Don't we need to know about the likelihood of gene escape? No, we don't. Gene escape is a fact of nature. Period. Save the money. Cancel the projects. Let those top brains do something useful instead of trying to find hypothetical phantoms. The genes have already escaped.” – Alan McHughen, creator of Triffid, in his book *Pandora's Picnic Basket*, Oxford, 2000

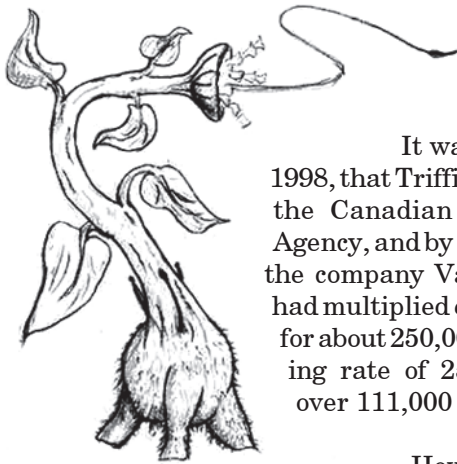
Triffid, a genetically engineered variety of flax, was supposed to have been done away with a decade ago. Now it has reappeared, this time in flax (linseed) growing illegally in Baden-Württemberg, Germany. Officials have discovered large quantities of genetically modified linseed growing in the southwestern German state. The state's agriculture minister said the majority of the seeds came from Canada, which is the principal supplier of linseed to Germany. 68% or more of the flax grown in Canada is exported, and 60% of its flax exports go to the EU, 30% to the United States, and 4% to Japan.



The major market for flax, apart for industrial uses, has always been the very sensitive and strongly anti-GMO health food sector.

After the announcement of the EU Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed on 8 September 2009, the German surveillance lab in the state of Baden-Württemberg confirmed the detection of GM linseed/flax variety FP967/CDC Triffid which is unapproved in the EU. It was found in a wide variety of flax/linseed products. – *www.genetic-id.de*

Based on rumour alone, before the contamination scandal was confirmed, cash bids for flax in Manitoba dropped from \$9.90-\$9.92 a bushel down to \$6.78 a bushel.



It was 11 years ago, in 1998, that Triffid was approved by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and by 2000 growers with the company Value Added Seeds had multiplied enough Triffid flax for about 250,000 acres. At a seeding rate of 25 lbs./acre, that's over 111,000 bushels.

DRAWING BY JOHN WYNDHAM
AUTHOR OF
THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS

However, in 2000, the Flax Council of Canada, in order to protect their export markets, managed to convince the CFIA to re-

move variety registration for the GM flax, making it illegal to grow it. All stocks of Triffid seed were to be processed or destroyed at that time, but apparently no records were kept by the CFIA or anyone else and no serious efforts made to ensure that this actually happened. How much of the Triffid seed was actually processed or destroyed is anybody's guess.

Triffid was the creation of Alan McHughen, then a professor of plant science at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon. As I wrote in the Aug-Sept 2000 issue of *The Ram's Horn* (#183),

"I first met Alan McHughen a number of years ago while working on my book, *The Rape of Canola* (1992). At the time Alan was all excited about the wonderful new transgenic flax that he had engineered to be tolerant of a specific herbicide. He named his baby Triffid and took out a patent on it. Alan has always been very sure that he has made a great contribution to science and agriculture, and he is offended by the refusal of the flax industry to allow his seed to be grown

commercially in Canada. He gives me the impression that he feels unreasonably deprived of his legitimate rewards in the form of royalties on sales of Triffid.

"The proclaimed advantage of Triffid was that it would grow in soils contaminated by residues from various herbicides. However, regular flax is highly herbicide tolerant, so there is little need for a herbicide tolerant flax. Even if one supported GMOs, there are very few circumstances where Triffid would provide an advantage.

"In the spring of 2000, two years after the decision to halt commercial growing of GE flax in Canada, it came to the attention of the the Saskatchewan Flax Development Commission (an elected body representing flax farmers) that McHughen was distributing Triffid seed samples for 'educational purposes' at teachers' meetings and conferences. McHughen was formally requested to stop by the Flax Development Commission and his boss, the head of the Crop Development Centre. In spite of these requests, McHughen included packets of the seed with his book promotion package that came out in June 2000. Oxford University Press kindly sent me one of the folders, complete with a packet of Triffid seeds. On one side the packet reads, '*Grow your own genetically modified organism*' and on the other, after some biotech promotion, '*Note: these seeds are for educational use only and cannot be used to grow a commercial crop.*' McHughen claimed the seeds were 'sterile', with no further explanation. It was only then that the CFIA took steps to de-register the noxious weed Triffid."

Given what we now know of Monsanto's long-standing policy of systematic contamination of various crops with their transgenic monsters, one might well imagine that McHughen was egged on in his criminal behaviour, if not actually coached, by Monsanto. Certainly Monsanto would be pleased with the outcome and – although it may have taken a decade – and would agree with McHughen's words, "The genes have already escaped."

Not long after McHughen's Triffid escapade, he move to the University of California, Riverside, conveniently out of reach of Canadian flax growers whose market he has probably single-handedly destroyed.

B.K.



Cargill

Cargill has reported net earnings of \$3.33 billion for fiscal 2009 ending May 31, down from a record \$3.95 billion in the prior year. Revenues for the full year dropped 3% to \$116.6 billion.

Greg Page, Cargill chairman and chief executive officer, said Cargill's business diversity was a source of strength. "Operating in many industries and in many countries allowed us to cushion some of the downturn by serving areas of growth, particularly in developing economies that experienced smaller declines in their gross domestic products."

Cargill continued to reinvest globally in fiscal 2009, opening or expanding major processing facilities in Brazil, Canada, China, France, Ghana and the United States, strengthening its global supply chains in canola, cocoa, palm, soy and biofuels. The company employs 159,000 people in 68 countries. – *Cargill.com, 18/8/09*

"Cargill CEO Greg Page says he often learns more from his own company than from the media about what's going on in the world, thanks to far-flung offices operating in 68 countries. Reports on everything from crop progress to weather patterns, political uprisings, stranded ships and commodity prices stream into Cargill's Minnetonka, Minnesota, headquarters every morning from employees working in industries as diverse as grain, finance, biofuels and cocoa. The information often gives Cargill an edge as it works as the world's middleman." – *ST, 19/8/09 (As its hometown newspaper, the Minneapolis-St.Paul Star-Tribune has privileged access to Cargill and as a result is the best public source for Cargill insider news. We receive clippings from the paper regularly.)*

Cargill is to introduce its Ingeo bioplastics to Brazil, offering the food, cosmetics and other industries a new packaging material derived from sugar instead of petroleum. Since the formation of NatureWorks as a 50-50 joint venture between Cargill and Teijin, the plastics have been used by more than 100 brands in the US, Europe and Asia. In July Cargill announced its acquisition of 100% of the NatureWorks business, with the latter becoming an independent company within the wider Cargill fold. The bioplastics, made in Nebraska, are to be imported through the port of Santos.

– *Foodproductiondaily.com, 7/7/09*

Years ago we introduced the phrase, "Feed and family and trade the leftovers" as a reversal of the logic of the market. Now Britain's Environment Secretary, Hilary Benn, wants the country to think about producing more food at home, and he has launched a consultation: Is our food supply adequate, is it sustainable and

kind to the environment and do we waste too much food? Cargill's comment:

"According to Paul Conway, a senior Cargill vice-president, this war-economy notion of growing more of our own food, of eating our plates clean, is a terrible muddle and causes more harm than good. The man from Cargill says that he *is* worried about food security but for Cargill, the big problem is not whether we will have enough food on the table, but whether it will be safe to eat. Talk about self-sufficiency and government intervention, hoarding, market intervention and price controls, is, he thinks, 'daft'. Defra – the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – should not be tempted to tell farmers what to grow and how much. *Nations should stick to growing what they are good at and trade surpluses.*" [emphasis added]

– *The Times, London, 311/8/09*

What does not worry Monsanto does apparently worry Conway: the next outbreak of food contamination. He wants tighter rules and better enforcement and points to the recent melamine poisoning scandal in China. "That is the stuff we worry about – the supply chain, making sure every link is safe. Markets go up and down and we want to make more money, but the thing we worry about is safety." It is doubtful, unfortunately, that this worry will cause Cargill to curb Monsanto and its poisons.

Asked for comments on the film *Food Inc.*, another spokesman for Cargill made this tidy (and clever) statement of Cargill ideology:

"Generally, open markets, which provide access to both locally and globally sourced food, are the most efficient means for people around the world to meet their food requirements with nutritious diets. One of the positives of organic food, for example, is that, for the first time in the state of Minnesota, we have not seen a decline in the number of farms. There is a burgeoning industry of small and modest-sized, high-value-added farms being built around the Twin Cities to provide vine-ripened and organic foods to metro residents. As a result of that, the total number of farms in Minnesota the last couple of years has stabilized. As our CEO, Greg Page, has pointed out, this is a great blessing for those communities and for those school districts that have suffered population losses.

But he went on to say that to do organic farming on a large scale would require us to triple the amount of land we farm to feed our population, with all the attendant environmental consequences. The late Norman Borlaug once said that broad practice of what he termed "medieval farming" could feed at most 4 billion people, much less than what the world population is today, to say nothing of what it will be by 2050. "

– *Cargill.com, 20/6/09*

Tapping into Bottled Water

In our last issue we reported on the decline in sales of Nestlé's bottled water. Here is the company's comeback (individualism and opportunism – turning a 'bad' thing into a good thing):

Nestlé has teamed up with Whole Foods Market to launch its first range of natural spring water in the US packaged in bottles containing 25% recycled PET. Consumers will be encouraged to recycle the Re-Source brand bottles at collection points in Whole Foods Market stores. Nestlé has pledged to donate 5 cents to the anti-litter charity Keep America Beautiful for every plastic beverage container that is recycled at participating stores. Nestlé plans to use the collected plastic to produce fleece, reusable shopping bags, carpet and new plastic beverage bottles.

–fpd.com.20/8/09



TAPPING OUT OF BOTTLED WATER

Get Rich Quick

National Bank Financial analyst Pierre Fournier says investors should not only consider this downturn and market decline as an opportunity to increase their exposure to the agriculture sector on the cheap, but also consider the possibilities created by the long-term trend of growing demand for agricultural commodities by taking long positions in fertilizer companies and companies such as Monsanto. Fournier also recommends owning property around the world that will produce valuable commodities.

Canadian investors are able to buy into funds that are only open to Canadian citizens. These funds buy vast tracts of land in the prairies which they then lease back to farmers; Agcapita Partners LP, Assiniboia Capital Corp., Sprott Resources and Bonnefield Financial all offer 'exposure to farmland'. Doug Emsley, president of Assiniboia Capital, says it owns 80,000 to 90,000 acres in Saskatchewan and has set up a management company to manage the 100 leases of the land to farmers it describes as 'well established, progressive farmers who have been in the business for many years and have a proven track record'. Emsley reports that in 2008 his investors made 30-35% return when the appreciation of the price of land plus the cash returns from land rents are combined. –G&M, 26/8/09, WP,3/9/09

For the global picture, see: <http://farmlandgrab.org>

THE RAM'S HORN

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