

Unsafe Genetically Modified Food

GMO Proliferation Bills in the US Congress

By Stephen Lendman

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Four in all so far plus another authorizing funding under a 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act. One is HR 875: "Food Safety Modernization Act of 2009." Introduced in the House on February 4 by Rep. Rosa DeLauro, (D, CT) whose husband has ties to Monsanto, with 39 co-sponsors, it's been referred to the Agriculture and Energy and Commerce Committees for consideration as follows:

-- discussion,

-- possible hearings,

-- "mark-up" to make changes and add amendments,

-- then a vote on further action - to either table or send to the full chamber for a vote, the regular procedure for House and Senate legislation.

The bill's text is deceptively innocuous. Its header reads:

"To establish the Food Safety Administration within the Department of Health and Human Services to protect the public health by preventing food-borne illnesses, ensuring the safety of food, improving research on contaminants leading to food-borne illness and improving security of food from intentional contamination, and for other purposes."

Related bills include:

S 425: "Food Safety and Tracking Improving Act." Introduced on February 12 and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. It purports: "To amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to provide for the establishment of a traceability system for food, to amend the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Inspections Act, the Egg Products Inspection Act. and the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to provide for improved public health and food safety through enhanced enforcement, and for other purposes."

HR 814: "Trace Act of 2009." Introduced on February 3 and referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee. It's: "To amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Inspection Act, and the Egg Products Inspection Act to improve the safety of food, meat, and poultry products through enhanced traceability, and for other purposes."

HR 759: "Food and Drug Administration Globalization Act of 2009." Introduced on January 28

and referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee. It's: "To amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to improved the safety of food, drugs, devices, and cosmetics in the global market, and for other purposes."

If its critics are right, HR 875 (and the others) are what Linn Cohen-Cole calls "Monsanto's dream bill" to proliferate the world with GMO contamination and control its entire food supply.

In 2007, F. William Engdahl wrote an important book on the topic called "Seeds of Destruction: The Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation." He explained how Washington and four agribusiness giants plan world domination by patenting all life forms to control food production globally - everything, crops and animals.

In 2003, Jeffrey Smith's "Seeds of Deception" explained the dangers of untested and unregulated GM foods exposing those who eat them to potential health risks. Reliable studies show that rats fed GM potatoes had smaller livers, hearts, testicles, brains, damaged immune systems, and showed structural changes in their white blood cells making them more susceptible to infection and disease than other rats fed non-GM potatoes. They also had thymus and spleen damage, enlarged tissues, including the pancreas and intestines, liver atrophy, and other serious problems.

Humans may be harmed the same way because GMOs saturate our diet. Over 80% of all processed foods contain them as well as rice, corn, soybeans, soy products, vegetable oils, soft drinks, salad dressings, vegetables, fruits, dairy products, meat, and other animal products plus an array of hidden additives and ingredients in products like tomato sauce, ice cream and peanut butter.

Because labeling in America is prohibited, consumers don't know what they're eating or the risks from foods they believe safe. It makes everyone part of a mass human experiment, the results of which are unknown. Health problems may take years to show up. They'll be no way to trace the cause, and they may be serious, irreversible, and potentially life threatening.

Wheat so far is GM-free, and according to an April 1 Reuters report, Monsanto formally withdrew "submissions for its genetically modified wheat from all regulatory agencies except the US Food and Drug Administration, a company spokeswoman said. The withdrawal is the last step in Monsanto's (earlier) announcement that it would" delay but not shelve plans to introduce the world's first GM wheat.

Monsanto sought approval in America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa and Colombia. It's now delayed, not halted. The company wants GM control over wheat and all other foods, but its official pronouncements deny it.

Monsanto Answers Its Critics

"Monsanto According to Monsanto" is a company blog site. Responding to critics on March 20, it headlined, "HR 875: Monsanto's Dream Bill - Or Just a Hallucination?" It dismisses the notion that it's behind the bill that will "give incredible power to Monsanto by criminalizing seed banking, requiring 24 hour GPS tracking of animals, stripping away of property rights, and

forcing industrialized farming on America."

Not so it says or that "Monsanto is behind the bill. (Further), nowhere is there any mention of seed banks, loss of property rights, or GPS tracking of animals. The bill seems to be nothing more egregious than a well-intentioned effort to improve food safety laws and processes."

The bill's presumed intentions will be discussed below, but one thing is clear. Businesses, not politicians, write and/or control virtually all legislation affecting them to assure their interests are served. Monsanto is an influential Ag giant, directly involved in all food-related laws, the company's denials notwithstanding. It's so powerful, it has virtual veto power over anything related to its operations and laws affecting them.

Yet it dismissively claims that the bill stems from "public concerns with relatively recent incidents with peanut butter, ground beef, (and) spinach, etc." False. The way to deal with these and related problems is simply enforce existing laws, not enact new ones. They're not because food giants object at a time they matter, not public health and safety that's of no concern to lawmakers.

Case in point: the USDA is woefully understaffed, under-budgeted, and only perfunctorily carries out inspections. A recent OMB Watch report highlights the problem. Headlined, "Federal Meat Inspectors Spread Thin as Recalls Rise," it explains that USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is charged with ensuring safe meat, poultry and eggs, but its budget and staff haven't kept pace with its mandate.

In FY 1981, it had about 190 workers per billion pounds of meat and poultry inspected. By FY 2007, it was fewer than 88 or less than half as many. Yet under federal law, FSIS must inspect all meat, poultry, and egg products intended for commercial use. Its web site states: "Slaughter facilities cannot operate if FSIS inspection personnel are not present (and) Only Federally inspected establishments can produce products that are destined to enter commerce."

Reality, however, belies the mandate as processors and manufacturers easily circumvent procedures, and according to inspectors interviewed, understaffing and lax policies contribute to the problem. An unsafe food supply results. Government policy is to blame, and current legislation is for other purposes, not a way to fix things. HR 875 and companion bills are for agribusiness, not improved food safety.

Some Likely Truths about HR 875

Several recent articles and the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) offered their analyses. They believe this and companion bills are vehicles to let agribusiness control the entire US food supply, destroy independent local farming, and end the production of healthy organic food. They may be right.

Linn Cohen-Cole calls HR 875 "monstrous on level after level - the power it would give to Monsanto (and other Ag giants), the criminalization of seed banking, the prison terms and confiscatory fines for farmers, the 24 hour GPS tracking of animals, the easement on their

property to allow for warrantless government entry, the stripping away of their property rights, the imposition (of) "industrial" standards, (and) planned elimination of (independent) farmers through all (the above) means."

It's no secret that Ag giants want all foods to be GMOs so they have total control. It's an agenda going back decades that Engdahl explained in his book. The science came out of US research labs in the 1970s when no one noticed or paid attention. It became apparent when the Reagan administration decided to make America dominant in a friendly unregulated environment, unmindful of safety and public health concerns, that's persisted ever since under Republican and Democrat administrations.

Monsanto is the dominant producer, a company with a long record of fraud, cover-up, bribery, deceit, and disdain for the public interest, yet it has enormous clout in Washington. In the 1980s, and especially under GHW Bush, it got unregulated free reign for its operations. A Bush Executive Order assured it. It ruled GMO plants and food to be "substantially equivalent" to ordinary ones of the same varieties, such as corn, wheat or rice. "Substantial equivalence" became the standard for the GMO revolution by sweeping away all regulatory restraints in spite of early concerns about safety that were confirmed overwhelmingly later on.

PASA says don't be fooled by the bill's deceptive language that hides its true intentions. Code words like "traceability, source verification, and best farming practices with proven scientific results" will force farmers to tag every animal (the requirement for industrial farms is one per 800,000) and use drugs, pesticides and GM seeds.

Already an Ohio state agricultural department swat team raided an organic food coop. The same thing happened to Pennsylvania Mennonite farmers and Wisconsin Amish ones. Other independents have been terrorized by home break-ins, burglaries, and treetop helicopter overflights scaring animals to death. Conventional seed farmers like North Dakota's Rodney Nelson have been sued by Monsanto for infringing on its patent rights because wind currents landed GM seeds on his land. In Poland, pro-agribusiness laws eliminated 60% of small farmers. Ones in the UK led to 60 suicides and in India to over 180,000.

From 1996 - 2004, worldwide GMO plantings expanded to 167 million acres, a 40-fold increase on 25% of global arable land. Over two-thirds of US farmland grows GMOs, more than 106 million acres. Argentina has 34 million acres, and production is expanding in Brazil, China, Canada, South Africa, Indonesia, Spain, Eastern Europe, and wherever else Ag giants have clout. They want it all, everywhere, and have complicit government allies to help them, here and abroad.

In Iraq, Paul Bremer's Order 81 covers patents, their duration, and stated: "Farmers shall be prohibited from re-using seeds of protected varieties or any (designated) variety." It gave Ag giants absolute control over farmers' seed usage for 20 years. They're now GMO, owned by the transnationals, and Iraqi farmers had to sign an agreement to pay a "technology fee" as well as an annual license fee. Plant Variety Protection (PVP) made seed saving and reuse illegal, and even "similar" seed plantings can result in severe fines and imprisonment. Agribusiness wants the same rights everywhere, including in America. If they get it, the future of organic and

independent farming will be threatened.

PASA says HR 875 doesn't regulate, prohibit or penalize private gardens or farmers markets directly. It focuses solely on ensuring supermarket food safety. But it regulates seeds, harvesting, transporting, seed storage facilities, and seed cleaning equipment under "food safety" provisions to prevent contamination - from agricultural water and manure, not pesticides, fertilizers, or unsafe GM seeds.

Seed cleaning equipment is crucial as it's how organic seed is saved. It's used after plants "go to seed" to separate them from plant material so farmers can harvest and store them for future plantings. HR 875 doesn't mention seeds but PASA believes its intent is to criminalize their banking through code language and bill provisions. Already, some areas of the country ban seed cleaning. Monsanto is likely involved, and the scheme is to claim the equipment produces contamination.

To prevent it, Ag giants want provisions that require expensive storage facilities, per line of seed. Organic farmers can't afford them, and this has nothing to do with food safety. But HR 875 claims it does.

PASA says FDA and USDA targeted organic and other independent farmers for years, at least since the early 1980s when high interest rates drove many out of business. Today, pro-industry laws have the same effect because Ag giants like Monsanto demand them. If they succeed, biodiversity and organic farming are at risk along with public health and safety to a greater degree than already given the amount of tainted and dangerous foods allowed, not addressed in HR 875.

While bill language doesn't prohibit organic or independent farming, that's the likely aim. Its provisions are Ag business-friendly, but destructive to small competitors by establishing heavy fines, imprisonment, onerous rules, and letting regulators interpret them as they wish.

Bill language also doesn't mandate a national animal ID system (NAIS) but does it by claiming it's in current law. It's so deceptive that Congress and consumer and food safety groups support it. But some are industry funded so look the other way when they should know better.

HR 875 and its companion bills are under consideration in committees, not yet voted into law. Activists feel now is the time to stop them before it's too late. Agribusiness wants total control over every step in the production, processing, distribution, storage, and marketing of foods to consumers.

Using the ruse of food safety and security, they aim to eliminate competition to have it all and replace wholesome foods with unsafe GMOs. Congress is willing to go along. And why not. Representatives like DeLauro get large Ag business contributions. In return, they assure bills like HR 875 are passed. It's for concerned people to stop them.

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