

Insult to European democracy

GM-free Ireland, Michael O'Callaghan, 19 Jan 2010

<http://www.gmfreeireland.org/news/index.php>

This article refers to a report published last week by the US Department of Agriculture attaché in Rome, Cynthia Barmore, with the revealing title "How to Influence Public Opinion about Agricultural Biotechnology" [1].

The report is an insult to Italian democracy, and to European farmers, food producers, retailers and consumers. It is also riddled with misinformation which AgriMoney.com failed to correct.

The USDA describes Italians who oppose GMOs as a "minority composed of fringe groups" and talks of the need for the US to "educate" Italian consumers about food! The anti-GM "fringe groups" which the USDA hopes to educate include:

- The Italian Government, whose Minister for Agriculture, Luca Zaia [2] said "A new ethics for agriculture is needed if we truly want to feed the world. My opposition to GMOs is well-known, in fact I do not believe that they are the solution to the hunger problem. We are with the farmers and always with those who work." [3]
- 16 of Italy's 20 Regional Governments - together with 41 provinces and 2,446 municipalities - that have declared themselves as GMO-free zones; [4]
- Italy's main farming union Coldiretti, with 18 regional federations for 98 provinces, 765 area offices, 9,812 sections, and over 568,000 farms; [5]
- Italy's biggest retailer, CoopItalia; [6] leading Italian food brands that have adopted GM-free supply chains such as the giant meat and poultry producer BovinMarche [7], Amadori (one of Europe's biggest producers of chicken and turkey) [8], and the poultry producer Fileni; [9]
- the national multi-stakeholder initiative ItaliaEuropa Liberi da OGM [10] involving 28 organisations representing farmers, large distribution, small and medium sized businesses, consumer, environmental, scientific, cultural and international cooperation interest groups opposed to GM food and farming. During two months in 2007, ItaliaEuropa organised a National Consultation on GMOs which collected 3 million votes against GMOs; [11]
- the University of Gastronomic Sciences [12], a government-backed international research and education centre for the renewal of farming methods, the protection of biodiversity, and the development of an organic relationship between gastronomy and agricultural science;
- Slow Food International [13], the Italian-based globally influential eco-gastronomic network which campaigns for good, clean, fair and GM-free food and farming with 100,000 members in 132 countries - whose founder Carlo Petrini was described by the UK's Guardian newspaper as one of the "50 people who could save the planet."

USDA wrong about the facts

The USDA report describes a Eurobarometer survey from 2005 as "the most recent data" on EU public opinion towards agricultural biotechnology, and claims that 65% of Italians "support biotechnology".

In reality, Eurobarometer's most recent survey on GMOs was published in 2008: it found that 58% of Europeans - including 55% of Italians - are "personally opposed" to GM food and

farming, while only 21% support their use [14]. The most recent Italian survey - carried out by Coldiretti-SWG in 2009 - found that 63% of Italian consumers believe that GM foods are less healthy than traditional foods, up from 52% in 2003. [14] The report's claim that most Italians "support biotechnology" is also misleading, because the vast majority of Europeans have no objection to non-GM biotechnology applications such as Marker Assisted Selection (MAS) of beneficial crop traits, and the production of insulin and other medicines from the contained use of GM bacteria in sealed vats in biosecure laboratories. No objection to these forms of biotech does not indicate support for GM crops!

Vatican not in favour of GMOs

The USDA's claim that the Vatican is a "vocal advocate" of GM crops as a way of easing hunger in Africa is sheer propaganda that was first disseminated after GM industry-funded scientists infiltrated an organisation called the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in a failed attempt to convince the Vatican to endorse GM farming in 2009. [15] Unless its diplomats are utter idiots, the USDA and the US embassy in Rome must surely know that the Pontifical Academy does not represent the views of the Vatican. Vatican policy can only be declared by the Pope, the Secretary of State, or the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and none of these bodies have ever given the Vatican's endorsement to GM food and farming.

Far from endorsing GMO's, Pope Benedict XVI has stated "The campaign to promote GM sowing, that pretends to grant food security [...] risks to ruin small farmers and to suppress their traditional crops, making them dependent on GM production companies" [16]. The Pope reiterated this view on 1 January 2010 when he expressed his support for "suitable strategies for rural development centred on small farmers and their families" [17]. The official Instrumentum Laboris (agenda) of the Synod of Bishops' Second Special Assembly for Africa held on 3-4 October 2009 makes this opposition to GM crops explicit: "Farm workers, on whom a great part of the African economy depends, are victims of injustice in marketing their products. They are often paid a very low price for their goods. Paradoxically, in some parts of Africa, the cost is even set by the buyers themselves. Populations already suffering from a disadvantage are thereby further impoverished. The seeding campaign of proponents of Genetically Modified Food, which purports to give assurances for food safety, should not overlook the true problems of agriculture in Africa: the lack of cultivatable land, water, energy, access to credit, agricultural training, local markets, road infrastructures, etc. This campaign runs the risk of ruining small landholders, abolishing traditional methods of seeding and making farmers dependent on the production companies of OGM [i.e. GMOs]". [18]

Scientific evidence of GM health risks

The claim that "Doctors and academics may prove more effective advocates [for GMOs] than government or industry figures" reflects the US Government's ignorance of science.

Medical and scientific groups and NGOs which have raised the alarm over the health dangers of GM feed and food include the Committee for Independent Research and Information on Genetic Engineering (CRIIGEN), Consumers International, the Union of Concerned Scientists, the International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture, the Independent Science Panel on GM, the African Centre for Biosafety, the Indian Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, the US Centre for Food Safety, the Canadian ETC Group, the British Institute of Science in Society, the German Foundation on Future Farming, the Norwegian Institute of Gene Ecology, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth,

GeneWatch, GM Watch, GM Free Cymru, GM-free Ireland, numerous other NGOs and university scientists around the world.

Despite suppression of scientific research and cover-ups by Monsanto and other agribiotech companies [19], at least 50 scientific papers have already reported on the health dangers of GM animal feed and food [20], including the hidden use of GM feed for the production of meat, poultry, eggs, fish and dairy produce that is still sold in the EU without a GM label to inform consumer choice [21]. As Prof Gilles-Eric Séralini of CRIIGEN points out, if the industry's secret risk assessment data on the health dangers of GMOs held by the European Food Safety Authority were made available for scientific peer review, all GM feed and food would be withdrawn from the market immediately. [22]

References

1. "How to Influence Public Opinion about Agricultural Biotechnology", USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, GAIN report number IT1003, prepared by Cynthia Barmore, Rome Italy:
[http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent GAIN Publications/How to Influence EU Public Opinion about Agricultural Biotechnology Rome Italy 1-1 1-2010.pdf](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/How%20to%20Influence%20EU%20Public%20Opinion%20about%20Agricultural%20Biotechnology%20Rome%20Italy%201-1-2010.pdf)
2. See Luca Zaia's profile on Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luca_Zaia and his website at <http://www.lucazaia.it/en/> Zaia refuses to allow GM field trials of GM crops in Italy. He has strongly criticised the EU Commission's recent approval of Syngenta's new GM maize, and stated that GMOs are "not the solution" to world hunger at the recent FAO summit
<http://www.lucazaia.it/en/index.php?newsId=c4b7dc8a178bf07e992f312628a3487c&page=1>. The author of the USDA report, Ms. Blackmore, can not have been unaware of Minister Zaia's anti-GM policy, since it was reported by her own USDA Foreign Agricultural Service GAIN report "Agricultural News for Italy and the EU" of 12 January 2010:
[http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent GAIN Publications/Agricultural News for Italy and the EU - December 2009 Rome Italy 1-12-2010.pdf](http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Agricultural%20News%20for%20Italy%20and%20the%20EU%20-%20December%202009%20Rome%20Italy%201-12-2010.pdf)
3. "Waiting for G8: Farmers union, Zaia to speculators: keep your hands off agriculture", 19 March 2009:
<http://www.lucazaia.it/en/index.php?newsId=2575f31deee3042f5d3cdf0b46166de1&page=2>
4. For details of GM free zones in Italy, see <http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/gmo-free-regions/italy.html>
5. Coldiretti <http://www.coldiretti.it>
6. CoopItalia <http://www.e-coop.it> adopted a GM-free policy in 1997 and uses its own "NO OGM" GM-free label. Its policy "OGM in agricoltura. Le regioni di chi dice NO. (GMOs in agriculture : Reason says NO) states that CoopItalia banned GMOs from its own-brand products in 1998, and monitors its GM-free guarantee via two independent certification bodies.
7. BovinMarche <http://www.bovinmarche.it>
8. Amadori http://www.amadori.it/vti_g2_home.asp?rpstry=14
9. Fileni <http://www.fileni.it> The company's policy states: "Our label clarifies one of the issues that most preoccupies consumers: None of our chickens or turkeys was fed on GM feedstuffs."
10. ItaliaEuropa Liberi da OGM <http://www.liberidaogm.org>. Members include Acli, Adiconsum, Adoc, Adusbef, Agci Agrital, Aiab, Alpa, Assocap, Avis, Cia, Cic, Città del Vino, Cna, Codacons, Coldiretti, Confartigianato, Consorzio del Parmigiano Reggiano, Coop, Copagri, Fedagri, Federconsumatori, Focsiv, Fondazione Diritti Genetici, Greenpeace, Legacoop Agroalimentare, Legambiente, Libera, Res Tipica, Slow Food Italia, Unci, Vas, and WWF. ItaliaEuropa leaflet (in English):
[http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/fileadmin/files/gmo-free-regions/italia_euro pa_leaflet.pdf](http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/fileadmin/files/gmo-free-regions/italia_euro_pa_leaflet.pdf)
11. Description of the National Consultation:
[http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/fileadmin/ temp /italia_europa_description.pdf](http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/fileadmin/temp/italia_europa_description.pdf)
Responsible Science for Sustainable Food appeal:
http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/fileadmin/files/gmo-free-regions/italia_europe_science_appeal.pdf
"I valori dell'agroalimentare italiano", (Values of Italian agri-food sector), report on a survey of 1,600 Italian households in October 2009:
<http://multimedia.coldiretti.it/Raccolta%20Documenti%20Forum%20Cernobbio%202009/Rapporto%20Coldiretti-Swg2009.ppt>
PowerPoint presentation by Coldiretti at the VIII International Forum of agriculture and feeding, 16-17 October 2009, Villa D'Este, Cernobbio, Italy <http://multimedia.coldiretti.it/Lists/Cernobbio/AllItems.aspx>
12. The University of Gastronomic Sciences http://www.unisg.it/welcome_eng.lasso was founded in 2004 by Slow Food (see below) in cooperation with the Italian regions of Piedmonte and Emilia-Romagna. It is a ministerially recognized, private non-profit international research and education centre for those working on renewing

- farming methods, protecting biodiversity, and building an organic relationship between gastronomy and agricultural science.
13. Slow Food International <http://www.slowfood.com/> is also the organiser of the Terra Madre Network <http://www.terramadre.info> which comprises 250 universities and research centres, including 450 individual academics throughout the world collaborating to protect and support small food producers, and to change the systems that put them in danger by bringing together those players with decision-making power: consumers, educational institutions, chefs and cooks, agricultural research entities, NGOs, etc.
 14. "Special Eurobarometer 295: Attitudes of European Citizens toward the Environment" (published in March 2008): http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_295_en.pdf. Extract: "The majority of Europeans declare that they are opposed to the use of GMOs (58%) while around a fifth (21%) supports their use. A further 9% say they have never heard of GMOs. At country level we see that the absolute majority in most countries are opposed to the use of GMOs. This is particularly the case in Slovenia (82%) and Cyprus (81%). Respondents in Malta, Portugal and Spain hold the mildest opinions in this respect which is mainly explained by the high share of respondents in these countries spontaneously admitting that they have never heard of the concept or do not form an opinion for or against." 15. As the US National Catholic Reporter points out, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences is "a think tank that does not issue authoritative church teaching" <http://ncronline.org/news/ecology/vatican-studies-genetically-modified-crops>. In May 2009, the Academy organised a study week in the Vatican on the theme "Transgenic Plants for Food Security in the Context of Development." According to the UK watchdog group Spinwatch, the event was a "charade by vested interests" and a total farce", whose speakers are "all GMO supporters, with many well known for their extreme pro-GMO views or having vested interests in GMO adoption." A May 13 release from the group asserts that several speakers have financial ties to Monsanto, an American agricultural company that is the world's largest producer of genetically engineered seed:
<http://www.spinwatch.org/articles-by-category-mainmenu-8/46-gm-industry/5283-spinwatch-condemns-vatican-gm-event-as-a-charade-by-vested-interests>
 16. Statement by Pope Benedict XVII in "Instrumentum Laboris", quoted in "When biotech business undermines science: the case of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences", press release by Guido Pollice, President of Verdi Ambiente e Società, and Fabrizia Pratesi, coordinator of Comitato Scientifico Equivita, 13 May 2009: http://www.antivivisezione.it/Academy_ignores_message_of_Pope.htm
 17. "Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2010": http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace_en.html
 18. "Agenda (Instrumentum Laboris) for the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops", 3-4 October 2009: http://www.jctr.org.zm/downloads/2ndsynodInstrumentum_Laboris.pdf
 19. "Do Seed Companies Control GM Crop Research? Scientists must ask corporations for permission before publishing independent research on genetically modified crops. That restriction must end". Scientific American, Editorial, August 2009 edition, published 21 July 2009: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=do-seed-companies-control-gm-crop-research>
 20. A useful check-list of scientific papers on the health dangers of GM feed and food can be found at <http://www.gmfreeireland.org/health/studies.php> "Genetic Roulette: The Documented Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods" by Jeffrey M. Smith Publisher: Yes! Books; hardcover; 336 pages;; available by mailorder from <http://www.GeneticRoulette.com>. "Effects of GMOs and pesticides systematically underestimated CRIIGEN appeal to public authorities, July 2009" Committee for Independent Research and Genetic Engineering: http://www.criigen.org/images/stories/pressrelease-ijbs_080709.pdf
 21. For info on the hidden use and dangers of GM animal feed, see the following: Leaked memo from the US Department of Health & Human Services revealing concerns by the US Food and Drug Administration's Center for Veterinary Medicine that toxins from GM foods might bioaccumulate in farm animals, and the related lawsuit that forced the FDA to disclose some of its secret documents on the dangers of GMOs: <http://biointegrity.org/list.html>.
"Detection of Transgenic and Endogenous Plant DNA in Digesta and Tissues of Sheep and Pigs Fed Roundup Ready Canola Meal", Sharma, R. et al., J. Agric. Food Chem., Vol. 54, No. 5, 2006, pp. 1699-1709;
"Assessing the transfer of genetically modified DNA from feed to animal tissues", Mazza, R. et al., Transgenic Res., Vol. 14, No. 5, 2005, pp. 775-784. "Detection of genetically modified DNA sequences in milk from the Italian market", Agodi, A., et al., Int. J. Hyg. Environ. Health, Vol. 209, 2006, pp. 81-88 .
 22. "Three Major GMOs Approved for Food and Feed Found Unsafe". Press release, CRIIGEN - Committee of Research and Information on Genetic Engineering [France], 11 December 2009: http://www.criigen.org/images/stories/pressrelease-3ogm-ijbs_1209.pdf "A Comparison of the Effects of Three GM Corn Varieties on Mammalian Health", Int J Biol Sci 2009; 5(7), 706-726: <http://www.biolsci.org/v05p0706.pdf> "New Report highlights Monsanto's corrupt science in GM canola [oilseed rape] assessment", Dr Brian John, GM Free Cymru [Wales, UK], 14 January 2010: http://www.gmfreecymru.org/pivotal_papers/canola.html