WN *Feedback*

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Big Food Watch. Coca-Cola
Big wheels within wheels in Spain



BIG FOOD WATCH

Access October-December 2013 Update on Coca-Cola and ICN Granada here





Partnerships between government, academic and industry in Spain, to prevent obesity and to encourage physical activity. The Spanish government agency engages with its national stakeholders

From Big Food Watch convenor Fabio Gomes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil:

In the *Update* section of the previous *WN* (access it above) I mentioned that Ángela López de Sá, Coca-Cola Scientific and Regulatory Affairs Director for Iberia, (above left) as from 2012 became executive director of AESAN. This is the Spanish official government Agency for Food Safety and Nutrition. As such she is also a Spanish representative at The European Food Safety Agency (EFSA).

She is seen last November at AESAN (above), with Pilar Farjas the president of AESAN (centre), and Ángel Gil, president of FINUT, the Iberian Nutrition Foundation, and also president of the September 2013 XX International Congress on Nutrition in Granada. The occasion pictured above was to consolidate the Spanish government's policies and programmes on nutrition, physical activity and obesity, by a partnership between AESAN and FINUT (1). I mentioned a rumour that Ángela López de Sá has not formally moved from the 'private sector' to the 'public sector' but is seconded from Coca-Cola and is expected to return to her commercial duties after a spell of responsibility for work in the public interest. I can now confirm that

this rumour is true (2). The European Food Safety Agency states that to avoid misunderstanding, for two years she will not take part in the discussions on any EFSA agenda item that could affect the soft drinks industry.

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Big Food Watch. The Gates Foundation
Big Bill and Big Food



BIG FOOD WATCH

Access October-December 2013 Update on Coca-Cola and ICN Granada here
Access October December 2013 BFW Words for our sponsors here

From Big Food Watch network member Claudio Schuftan:

In his commentary 'Words for our sponsors' (1), Fabio Gomes says rightly: ' "Big Food" refers to the class of food and drink product manufacturers and caterers that have become colossal since the 1980s, and also to corporate commodity traders, suppliers, associated industries such as ingredients and additives manufacturers, and the organisations they have set up and control to represent their collective interests'.

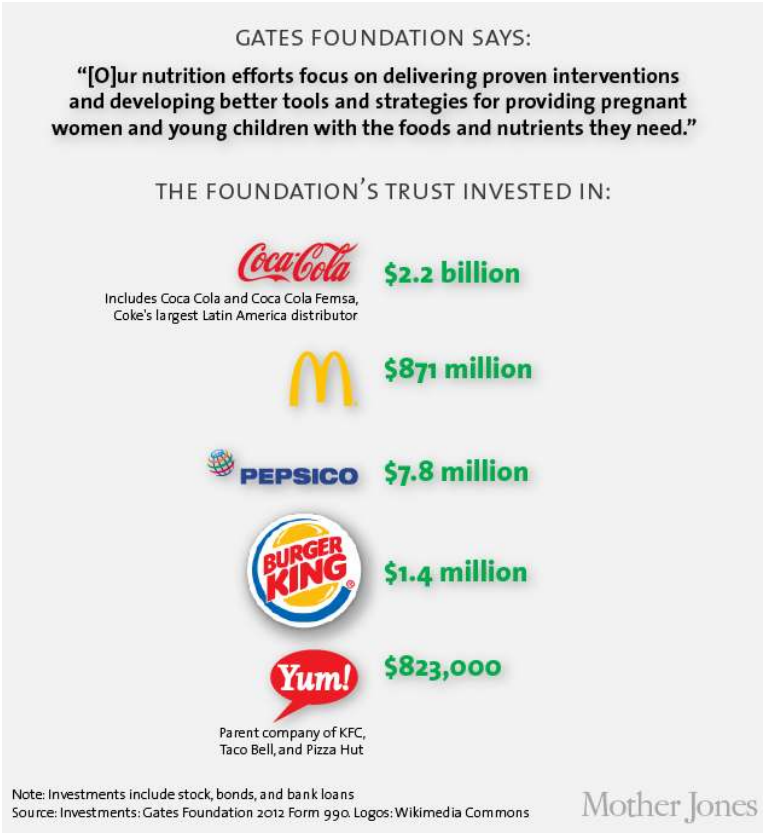
This definition should be widely used (2). The chief Big Food corporations include all the transnationals. But a full definition also needs to include supporting organisations, such as foundations and non-profits whose core funding is solely or mostly from industry and which while they may be independently advised, are controlled by corporations. These include the International Life Sciences Institute and the International Food Information Council, and ILSI and IFIC subsidiaries.

Philanthrocapitalists



Bill Gates as a Time Person of the Year (left) with Melinda Gates and Bono, for charitable work. At the World Economic Forum (left), he speaks, flanked by the CEOs of Pepsi-Co and Unilever.

In this letter I go one step further, and propose to include organisations formally independent from Big Food, but which have strong permanent shared interests. My example is the Gates Foundation. Bill Gates is a mighty man, invited to speak at the UN General Assembly twice – and see the picture above of him speaking at the World Economic Forum, flanked by the CEOs of PepsiCo and Unilever. Aside from how the WEF itself should be categorised, below is a graphic from *a recent journal feature* (3), with figures from the Foundation's 2012 annual accounts. This updates an *earlier analysis* of Gates Foundation holdings (4) showing Gates as the largest single shareholder in Coca-Cola.





The Gates Foundation $US 500 million headquarters in Seattle (left). (Right): Bill Gates and fellow multi-billionaire Warren Buffett share jokes and Cokes and cards maybe on a mercy mission

Does Gates have big holdings in Coca-Cola and McDonald's because their shares are hot? Or are they a way to lever these Big Food corporations towards healthy policies (if so, evidence please)? Or is it simply that in common with other super-rich and powerful US citizens, Bill Gates believes in 'the American way' (on this, see below)? He is frequently challenged on the ethics of Foundation holdings. So Bill and Melinda Gates have led a policy review, as a result of which they decided to continue to invest in companies that give the best financial return, including agrotechnology giant Monsanto and world commodities dealer Cargill (5). An exception is Big Tobacco, which Bill and Melinda see as 'egregious'.

Bill calls the shots

The obvious explanation of the shareholdings is an innocent one. The two trustees of the Gates Foundation are Bill and Melinda Gates, and Bill Gates is putting his money where his mouth is. He enjoys cheeseburgers and Coke, *as shown in this video* of him from the US *60 Minutes* show, ordering a cheeseburger and a large Coke in his favourite burger joint in Seattle. He thinks about burgers, too. Asked to say what are the cheapest things that give him most pleasure, he replied: 'kids, cheeseburgers and Open Course Ware courses'. His advice to University of Washington students on wealth has been that after the first few millions 'it's the same hamburger'.

The style of the Gates Foundation, as a manifestation of Bill and Melinda Gates, is also easy to understand. Bill Gates says he is 'an impatient optimist'. This aspect of his character was learned as he progressed from Harvard dropout to being the youngest billionaire in the US, and so on then up. He is very sure of his own opinions and judgements, as many entrepreneurs are. Also he is a US citizen raised in the US. It is apparent from Gates Foundation grants that what he wants in his charitable work is much the same as what other powerful US institutions and people want. The 'American style' is to 'fix problems'. The Foundation has done good work. But in our context it prefers to seek to solve global problems by giving grants for specified programmes, and being interested mainly in 'magic bullet' treatments which show quick measurable results, rather than enabling empowerment of the people living in impoverished countries, which is an altogether more complex process.

Box 1

Philanthrocapitalism

This is an edited extract from Global Health Watch (www.ghwatch.org), produced by the People's Health Movement.

The term 'philanthrocapitalism' describes a growing movement to harness the power of the market in order to achieve social outcomes, to increase economic growth in impoverished regions, and to make philanthropy more cost-effective. In today's world of immense wealth and enduring poverty it is vital to examine philanthropy.

The Gates Foundation spends billions of dollars on health across the world. The majority of funding is provided for research in malaria, HIV/AIDS, immunisation, reproductive and maternal health, and other infectious diseases. Bill Gates could have spent his vast wealth on art museums or vanity projects. He chose to go to Africa with much of his money. Most literature and coverage has focused on the positive impact of the Gates Foundation.

The Foundation is governed by the Gates family. There is no board of trustees, other than Bill and Melinda Gates, nor any independent scrutiny. The Foundation answers only to the Gates family. It operates like an agency of a government, but unaccountably.

Its investments are in corporations whose activities are contrary to the Foundation's charitable goals. Its position is that it 'can do the most good for the most people through its grant-making, rather than investment of its endowment'. Bill and Melinda Gates have chosen not to 'rank' companies, except that the Foundation will not invest in tobacco, or in companies that are a conflict of interest for Bill or Melinda. Over 10 per cent of the Foundation's endowment is invested in Coca-Cola and McDonald's.

Priorities

Philanthropy can be a potent instrument for 'managing' the poor rather than empowering them. Few grants go to civil rights and social movements. Fewer are given to programmes calling for a redistribution of wealth and land.

Partnership with industry is an explicit and prominent part of the Gates Foundation's global health strategy. Many of its executives come from the corporate world. The Foundation's corporate background has resulted in a bias towards biomedical and technological solutions. The Gates Foundation has not been interested in health systems strengthening and has rather competed with existing health services.

Remarks made in private and public by Gates Foundation executives indicate a wish to expand the role of the private sector in delivering health care in low-income countries. The ties between the Foundation and the pharmaceuticals industry, as well as its emphasis on medical technology, suggest that it is converting global health problems into business opportunities.

The ability of individuals to amass so much private wealth should be seen as a symptom of political and economic failure. The Gates Foundation's policy of 'passive investment' contradicts its mission and reveals its own conflicted interests.

The Gates Foundation is too dominant. It is unaccountable. It is not transparent. It is dangerously powerful and influential.

Bill and the bottom line



Bill Clinton on a platform with Bill Gates, discussing how to prevent and control HIV-AIDS (left). Bill Gates (right) partnering with UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon at the UN in New York

To understand the state of public health nutrition, it is necessary to know what are the drivers of food systems and food supplies and thus of dietary patterns. Anything short of this merely scratches the surface. I am a member of the *Big Food Watch* network team, as I am of the People's Health Movement, because protection of public health and public goods must start with empowerment of the people who are most impoverished and exploited. Debunking myths is part of what we do.

I propose that in any full definition of Big Food, institutions and entities whose policies and programmes consistently aid and support Big Food, should be included. This list should include bodies with large shareholdings or cross-directorships in Big Food corporations. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation belongs in this list.

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Genetic engineering

Fables of industrialised agriculture: 2

Access June-July Colin Tudge on Living well off the land (1) here
Access August-September Colin Tudge on Living well off the land (2) here
Access October-December Colin Tudge on 'golden rice' here

From Colin Tudge, Oxford, UK

In the last issue of *WN* I explained why 'golden rice' is a hype, a public relations exercise by the biotechnology transnational corporations, backed by some politicians in powerful countries hooked on to the ideology that has created casino capitalism of which biotech profits are a part. Here with the kind agreement of the *WN* editors I put 'golden' rice in its context.

This long letter is about agriculture. I have been asked to explain why this is relevant to public health nutrition. This needs some space but is essentially easy. Agriculture drives food systems. Food systems drive food supplies. Food supplies drive dietary patterns. Thus when corporations make most profit destroying the Brazilian rain-forest and savannah to raise cattle and grow soya for cattle feed, and in the process also destroy the livelihoods of many millions of people, the world's consumers will be burgered. Seen like this, there is not a lot of point in education programmes gently suggesting to people that they might like to go easy on burgers – and so many other junk products – when these are available 24-7, cheap, and thanks to food technology wizardry with chemicals, ultra-delicious. To kill a snake, strike at the head.

Baseless claims for biotech

Agricultural biotech is now the lynch-pin of agricultural research almost everywhere. We have been told that genetically engineered crops increase yields with lower chemical inputs. But they do not consistently or even usually yield well under field conditions, and often lead to increase in chemical inputs.

Also, despite ignorant or knowing claims to the contrary, there is no worldwide consensus of scientists vouching for their safety. The European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility has drawn up a petition that denies any such consensus, and points out that 'a list of several hundred studies does not show genetically modified food safety'. One the first day the petition was signed by over 100 scientists, physicians and lawyers, and by 7 November the number was 231 (1).

One signatory is Belinda Martineau from the UC Davis Genome Center, University of California, who helped commercialise the world's first GM whole food, the Flavr Savr tomato. She says 'I wholeheartedly support this thorough, thoughtful and

professional statement… Society's debate over how best to utilize the powerful technology of genetic engineering is clearly not over. For its supporters to assume it is, is little more than wishful thinking'.

Elena Alvarez-Buyllla, coordinator of molecular genetics of plant development and evolution, Institute of Ecology, Mexico, says: 'Sweeping claims that genetically modified (GM) crops are substantially equivalent to and as safe as, non-GM crops, are not justifiable. We must be especially cautious in the case of proposed release of a GM crop in the centre of genetic origin for that crop. An example is the planting of GM maize in Mexico, which is the centre of genetic origin for maize. GM genes can irreversibly contaminate the numerous native varieties which form the genetic reservoir for all future breeding of maize varieties'.

She continues: 'In addition, maize is a staple food crop for the Mexican people. So GMO releases can threaten the genetic diversity on which food security depends, both within Mexico and globally. Such decisions with broad implications for society should not be made by a narrow group of self-selected experts, many of whom have commercial interests in biotechnology, but must also involve the millions of people who will be most affected. As things stand, in Mexico we have an ongoing uncontrolled experiment with no independent scientific or popular mandate, in which GM genes are allowed to crossbreed with native maize varieties. The inevitable result will be genetic alterations with unpredictable effects.'

Overall, after 30 years of concerted endeavour, ultimately at our expense and at the expense of the neglect of matters far more pressing, no genetically engineered food crop has ever solved a problem that really needs solving and that could not have been solved by conventional means in the same time and at less cost.

It's all about power and profit

The *real* point behind genetically modified organisms is to achieve the combination of corporate and big government complete control of all agriculture, which is the biggest by far of all human endeavours. This Big Tech agriculture would be geared not to general well-being but to the maximisation of profit and power for a tiny elite of rich and powerful people and their courtiers, mostly from the global North. The last hundred years, in which agriculture has been industrialised and intensified, have laid the foundations. Genetically engineered organisms can finish the job. The technology itself is complex and esoteric. Only those who are tooled up with masses of capital and trained technicians can embark on it.

The technology can be, and is, readily protected by patents. Crops not protected by patents are being made illegal. Only parts of the European Union have so far been in favour of genetic engineering protected for corporations by patent. But the list of crops that it allows farmers – or any of us – to grow becomes more restricted. Those who dare to sell the seeds of traditional varieties not officially approved can be fined or go to prison. Your heritage allotment could soon land you in deep trouble.

As genetically engineered crop organisms spread, they could soon become the only options. Then all agriculture, the key to human survival, will become the exclusive property of the few huge companies that hold the patents. This is a horrible prospect. The obvious abyssal loss of biodiversity will make the whole world even more precarious than it is now, especially if climate changes the growing conditions year by year. Yet the UK support for crop biotechnology and for the thinking behind it is unswerving. Government *wants* agriculture to be seen as big business.

Lip service is paid to democracy (young men and women are sent to their deaths in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere to defend the idea of it). In truth we have rule by oligarchy: a coalition of corporations and government, with scientists in attendance. This monolith, and the crude thinking on which it is founded, is a far bigger threat to humanity than North Korea, or 'terrorism' or the collapse of banks, or dwindling oil.

Produce! Produce!



2013. John Beddington (left) in his doctoral robes at Harper Adams University, Wales, serving the big agriculture business. Others include the UK biggest landowner the Duke of Westminster (right)

We have been assured, time and again, that there is no alternative; that without high tech, industrialised agriculture, we will all starve. This is the greatest untruth of all; though it has been repeated so often by so many people in such high places. Whether the officially sanctioned untruths are ignorant or knowing, whether they spring from misconception or are downright lies I will leave others to judge. But in either case, their repetition by people who have influence in public affairs, and who should know better, is outrageous.

Specifically we have been told that the world will need 50 per cent more food by 2050. The former chief scientific advisor to the UK Government, Sir John Beddington, said this in the 2011 *Foresight* report associated with his name (1). His argument was, and is, that out of the current 7 billion people on Earth 1 billion are undernourished; that the global population is due to rise to 9.5 billion by 2050; that people 'demand' more and more meat and animal food as they have more money to spend; and that meat requires enormous resources to produce (already the world's livestock gobble up about 50 per cent of the world's cereal and well over 90 per cent of the soya).

So given these assumptions, of course 50 per cent more food is needed. Some say 50 per cent more, and some have raised the ante to double, to 100 per cent more. Thus the message comes from on high, we must focus on production, come what may.

In September 2013 John Beddington was still on-message. Here he is above, left, under the hat that looks like a child's birthday cake. He was receiving an honorary doctorate at Harper Adams University, Wales. This is a new university whose purpose is to service the agriculture, food and drink industries with technically well-trained students. He said in his speech of thanks: 'In 12 years' time there will be another billion people on the planet. We need to be thinking about how we can produce enough food with limited supplies of water and with the complication of climate change, so agricultural technology is going to be a real key for the future because it will genuinely bring benefit to mankind'.

But there now is enough food



Robert Watson of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development; and Hans Herren of the Millennium Institute. There is more than enough food

Others, including some far more professional and who have far more knowledge and insight, tell a different story. In 2009 the Washington DC-based International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development produced its 600 page report *Agriculture at a Crossroads,* (3) which took three years and involved 400 specialists in 110 countries.

Set up by the World Bank with relevant UN agencies, the report was not cooked up to follow a pre-determined recipe. Co-chair of the project was Robert Watson, at that time the chief scientist at the World Bank (pictured above, left). The IAASTD report points out that the world already produces enough staple food to support 14 billion – twice the present number. A billion are now food- and nutrition insecure, of whom many starve, because the wrong food is produced in the wrong places by the wrong means by the wrong people – and once the food is produced, half of it is wasted.

The UN demographers state that although human numbers are rising the *rate of the rise* is going down and should reach zero by 2050 – so the numbers should level out. Nine and a half billion is predicted to be the maximum – and 50 per cent more than will ever be needed is already produced. So here we have equally simple arithmetic

with a totally different conclusion. The task is not to increase output, but to produce what is already produced (or even less) by means that are kinder to people, livestock, and wildlife; more sustainable; and more resilient. Or take Hans Herren, president of the Millennium Institute, also in Washington (pictured above, right). While based in Benin he developed a biological pest control system that secured the African cassava crop and saved an estimated 20 million people from starvation. He chaired the IAASTD project until 2009.

He insists that genetic engineering now offers no significant economic or social advantages to poor small-scale farmers. This is in part because it reduces the resilience of agriculture systems by reducing the diversity of crops and the genetic diversity within varieties. But more biodiversity is needed, from crop/animal to system levels. He says: 'Today's GMOs don't produce more food, they do help cut production costs but only in the first few years until insects and weeds catch up again, as we have seen earlier with the use of insecticides. The GMO crop cultivars used today are basically a step back. Many pest problems can actually be solved with classical breeding methods that do not force farmers into costly licensing agreements with seed companies or lock them into the use of specific herbicides'.

Hans Herren believes the way forward was well described in the IAASTD report he initially co-chaired. The report calls for a change in paradigm, the transition of the industrial and external energy dependent agriculture into a multifunctional agriculture that promotes a systems approach to production and problem solving. A simple way of expressing this is that we are – or need to be – all in it together. If we detach ourselves from agriculture and its whole meaning, and are merely interested in the price and range of what is in our supermarkets, we are sunk – and by 'we' I mean humankind, now and in future.

Over-supply, profits – and obesity

The truth is that for commercial purposes – for the maximisation not of health and well-being but of wealth – it is too *easy* to provide good food for everyone. After all, a few years ago, when international economies were tweaked a little differently, farmers in Europe and the US were embarrassed by gluts of wheat and maize; and as farmers have always known, gluts are second only to total crop failure as the route to financial disaster.

The obvious and sensible solution would be to reduce production: to tailor output to need and to genuine desire. 'Set-aside' was a crude stab at this. But the far more lucrative course is the one that has now been taken. This is to over-produce, and thus over-supply and over-feed. This accounts for what is now uncontrolled pandemic obesity. If then it turns out that people really don't need or even decide that they don't want more food, then those who seek primarily to maximise wealth must pretend that they do. So the word is put around, backed by carefully selected and

uncritical statistics, that we will need 50 per cent more food production in the next few decades.

The resulting surpluses are then fed to livestock. These animals could, incidentally, be fed in more than adequate numbers if we made better use of the world's grasslands, which account for about two-thirds of all agricultural land. Alternatively, which is a scam, though again it can be made to look respectable, the surplus wheat and maize can simply be burnt if it is labelled as 'biofuel'. 'Demand' (in this scenario) is judged not by what people actually say they want (what people ever said they wanted wheat-based biofuel, or cereal-fed beef rather than grass-fed beef?) but by what can be sold by aggressive public relations and successfully lobbied through complaisant politicians, civil servants and other including UN officials, some of whom may, as retirement draws close and pension pots need to be bumped up, be hired by big business.

The next step in the fake argument is that the 50 per cent extra can be provided only by industrial agriculture and that this industry, like all human endeavour, works most efficiently when driven by the maximally competitive global market. Let's get clear about this phrase 'maximally competitive'. What it means, is an economic driven driven by politicians and officials, which loads the dice in favour of the gigantic transnational corporations. The 'magic bullet' of genetic engineering is just part of the hype.

But small mixed farms can be the most productive of all, per unit area (4). Furthermore, to produce their 30 per cent, the industrial farms gobble up enormous quantities of oil for their industrial chemistry with immense collateral damage, not least to the climate. In contrast traditional farms are low input, and at least when properly managed, need not be damaging at all.

Support traditional farming!



Farming families and communities as here in rural Africa and Asia, know how to cultivate and protect their land, and are economical, rational and productive. It is they above all who need support

More yet: traditional farms worldwide typically produce only about a half or even a third of what they could produce. This is not because the farmers are incompetent, as foreign observers most of whom have no knowledge or understanding of farming

like to claim. It is because they lack the most basic supports. For instance, if farm prices are left to the 'global market' – meaning to corporations and commodity speculators – they fluctuate, they go up and down, so that farmers who have no proper financial support from banks or governments are subject to dumping of foreign surpluses. They then cannot afford to invest upfront in more production. So they err on the side of caution, while big western industrial farmers, or at least the richest ones, are on to bonanzas.

Control of commodity prices could double the output of traditional farms – to repeat, who produce half of the world's food – could increase it by 100 per cent. Heroic efforts would be needed to increase the output of high-tech western crops and livestock even by another 10 per cent, because the 10-tonne per hectare wheat fields and the 10,000 litre-plus dairy cows are already bang up against physiological limits (and the physical condition of the livestock is an outrage, well beyond welfare limits). But all the official effort, and our money, is poured into more industrialisation. Policy, agricultural and alas scientific, goes where the profits lead.

High-tech costs the earth

Finally, we are told that the high-tech, 'global market' approach to food production keeps prices down. Small, mixed, traditional-style farms are said to be far too expensive because they are labour-intensive. This is not true, for 80 per cent of what people spend on food in supermarkets goes to the middle-men and the banks who lend the money to set up the system in the first place. The farmers get 20 per cent. If those farmers are up to their ears in debt, as they are likely to be if they have gone down the industrial high-tech route, then a fair slice of that 20 per cent goes to the banks to pay their debts. At most, the farm labour costs that we are supposed to try

so hard to keep down probably account for less than 10 per cent of the total food bill. It's the 80 per cent we need to get down.

When farmers sell directly to customers they get 100 per cent of the retail price; through farmers' markets they typically get around 70 per cent, and through local shops at least 30 per cent. With different marketing the small farmers can certainly make a good living – and farming as a whole in Britain could easily soak up all the million young people under the age of 25 who are presently being invited to drift from job centres to off-licenses, in societies where rates of all the conditions caused by cynicism and despair continue to soar. Agricultural economists don't tend to take social costs into account. They don't think about teenagers getting drugged or drunk or pregnant or violent or depressed or suicidal unless their own children are involved, and even then they don't connect the dots.

Agriculture in my own country of Britain and in the world at large needs an Agrarian Renaissance. This will mean different ways of farming and marketing and different people in charge. The oligarchy of corporates, government, and compliant academics

and officials has failed. Farming that can actually feed us is innately democratic. Worldwide, the farmers know best – but the oligarchs rarely talk to them. They are content merely to impose their scientific and economic and scientific dogmas: high tech in this red in tooth and claw version of globalised uncontrolled capitalism that is tearing the world apart.

Mercifully, worldwide many people are helping to bring the Renaissance into being. They range from setters-up of local farmers' markets to organisations like European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility, to the worldwide peasants' movement, La Via Campesina. As many as can be fitted in congregate each year at the Oxford Real Farming Conference. This month we will meet again.

This is the cause of our age. Whatever else we may aspire to do, we absolutely have to get agriculture right.

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How to respond

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