

Millions against Monsanto

May 30, 2013 by Marcia Ishii-Eiteman



Two million people, over 400 cities, more than 50 countries. These numbers from organizers of the May 25th global “[March against Monsanto](#)” tell the story of a tide that is turning fast and hard against one of the greatest corporate villains of our time. From Tokyo to Turku, from Tallahassee to Tasmania, people spanning six continents came out to declare “Enough!”

The global response witnessed this past weekend is a powerful rebuke not only to Monsanto, but also to the U.S. State Department which has aggressively pushed a self-described “active biotech agenda” in over 100 countries. And the lengths to which the State Department has gone to promote Monsanto’s interests have been charted in a new [Food & Water Watch exposé](#).

Biotech Ambassadors

The U.S. government’s use of its vast network of embassies to push genetically engineered (GE) products, and compel the adoption of pro-biotech policies and laws around the world, is not a new phenomenon. Wikileaks released State Department cables some years back showing just that. [TruthOut](#) and [Sourcewatch](#) have been steadfastly reporting on our government’s not-so-covert biotech agenda ever since.

With the latest analysis from Food & Water Watch (FWW), we now have an even clearer picture of our government’s underhanded — and over the top — biotech campaign. And I have to say, it’s not pretty.

Sifting through 926 State Department cables from 113 countries, sent between 2005 and 2009, FWW has exposed a coordinated U.S. strategy with these core goals:

1. **Promote the GE seed/pesticide industry’s business interests abroad.** U.S. embassies in Romania, Germany, Slovakia, Egypt, Argentina and Spain worked directly with or on behalf of Monsanto and other GE companies to push through GE seed approvals, enable field testing, negotiate seed patent protection and royalty payments and generally bolster the company’s image in those countries.
2. **Lobby foreign governments to establish pro-biotech laws and regulations.** Working with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Agriculture Department (USDA), the State Department successfully weakened GE crop oversight and blocked GE bans and labeling laws in Poland, Turkey, Nicaragua and numerous other countries. The U.S. also

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sought to crack European Union resistance to GE crops by bolstering pro-biotech inclinations in Bulgaria and Romania. In Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria, the State Department, USAID, Monsanto and pro-biotech foundations joined forces to establish regulatory laws to pave the way for subsequent GE crop imports.

- 3. Shower them with junkets and junk science.** The fun and easiest way for the State Department to achieve its goals: host parties with opera stars on magical islands off of Venice. Enjoy the good life at luxury hotels in the Philippines or in spa towns in Slovakia. According to FWW, “the State Department organized or sponsored 28 junkets from 17 countries between 2005 and 2009.” (So that’s where all my tax dollars have been going.)

Of course, the PR job becomes even easier when unfettered by the [scientific evidence](#) indicating that GE crops are unlikely to help reduce poverty, increase yield or feed the world. Writing in HuffPo, [Leslie Hatfield](#) calls out the “questionable honesty in the State Department’s messaging.”

- 4. Protect U.S. biotech exports.** When a few days on holiday in Milan doesn’t do the trick, it’s time to get serious and [twist arms](#). The not-so-funny goal here is to ensure unimpeded U.S. access to European, Asian and African markets for GE products. The strategy: challenge any nation’s restrictions on GE imports as an unfair trade barrier and threaten countries with aggressive retaliation, should they stand firm. The State Department successfully challenged the EU’s precautionary approach to GE crops at the World Trade Organization with the intent not only of prying open European markets, but also signaling to developing countries that they should not follow Europe’s lead and should instead embrace GE technology.

What offends me most about all this, is that at a time when Americans are joining millions around the world in denouncing Monsanto, demanding the right to know what’s in our food and reclaiming control of our food and farming systems, our government is using its might — and our hard-earned tax dollars — to crush the very same, deeply cherished desires for food sovereignty motivating so many more. That is plain wrong.

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