

Why So Secret, Why So Fast?

by Linda Wells

Let's have a public debate about the Trans Pacific Partnership

If you're like me, you've known for a while that the U.S. is negotiating a new pact called the Trans Pacific Partnership, the TPP, but you haven't taken the time to figure out exactly why it matters.

I don't blame us—the corporations and governments negotiating the deal don't want our opinions slowing down their shiny new “free trade” vehicle. Ditto for a companion treaty with Europe, the Trans Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA) also to be completed in 2014.



Photo: Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition

Members of the Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition demonstrate outside Cargill's headquarters in protest over secret TPP negotiations.

In fact, if everything goes as planned, very few of us—not reporters, only a handful of legislators, and certainly not you and me—will get to read about these deals before they are signed into law.

But there have been some big hiccups in that plan, making me think it is actually possible to stop this train if we all start paying attention right now.

In case you missed it, in November, Wikileaks released the TPP's chapter on intellectual property. In January, the environment chapter was leaked. We don't yet have text about agriculture, but there is no doubt the TPP will have a negative impact on food and farming.

This is like NAFTA, right?

The TPP is a “free trade” agreement between the United States and, so far, eleven other countries in the Pacific region. It's similar to NAFTA in that it creates specific rules for all the governments involved to decrease regulation of trade, making it easier for multinational corporations to invest in new markets and sell products abroad—further consolidating global corporate power.

Another scary similarity between these agreements is that they set up a mechanism for corporations to sue governments if profits are disturbed by government regulations. Agreements like NAFTA, TAFTA and the TPP essentially uphold the lowest

common denominator in terms of worker and environmental protections as the desirable standard, opening up a wide range of domestic laws to legal challenge by foreign investors.

Slow it down!

If “Fast Track” approval passes, we will have no hope of defeating or amending the TPP. Fast Track approval means Congress hands over its negotiating power to the executive branch, just as it did with NAFTA—and it means that only the Obama administration and its committee of mainly corporate advisors would see the full agreements before they are approved.

Fortunately, in January two “Dear Colleague” letters opposing Fast Track approval circulated in the House of Representatives—with signatures from 173 representatives. It was a surprising mix of Democrats and Republicans. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) wrote to President Obama: “If transparency would lead

continued on back page

Linda Wells, Associate Organizing Director, is based in PAN's Midwest office in Minneapolis and coordinates our Corporate Control program.

Inside This Issue

USDA Greenlights New GE Seeds p. 2
Innovating for Healthy Soil
and Healthy People p. 3

Pesticide Action
Network
NORTH AMERICA



USDA Greenlights Dow's New GE Seeds

by Marcia Ishii-Eiteman

In January, the Department of Agriculture welcomed in the new year by presenting Dow AgroSciences with a bountiful gift: a virtual green light for the pesticide company's new genetically engineered corn and soybean seeds. These crops are designed specifically to be used with Dow's infamous herbicide, 2,4-D.

Dow has been waiting two years for the go-ahead from USDA to start marketing its 2,4-D-resistant corn and soy. And it now appears the corporation will get what it wants, despite vocal opposition from outraged farmers, healthcare professionals and concerned communities across the country—including the PAN community.

Agricultural scientists warn that introduction of 2,4-D-resistant crops is a very bad idea and could lead to as much as a 25-fold surge in 2,4-D use across the country over the next six years. This would result in severe damage to vulnerable crops, economic loss to farm businesses and harm to rural communities' health.

Surprised perhaps by the vehement public opposition, USDA acknowledged last year that these 2,4-D crops could in fact cause "significant environmental harm," and agreed to prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement. But in the draft statement released in January, USDA simply shrugged away all of the public's concerns.

Farmers and rural families oppose 2,4-D seeds

Fruit and vegetable growers in particular have been warning USDA that their crops are extremely vulnerable to damage from pesticide drift, specifically naming 2,4-D and its close cousin dicamba as threats. (Monsanto has developed dicamba-resistant cotton and soybean varieties, still pending USDA approval.)

Farmers have already lost thousands of acres of crops and much more than that in dollars due to 2,4-D and dicamba drift. In one incident in California, a single 2,4-D application resulted in the herbicide drifting over a hundred miles, destroying a pomegranate orchard and 15,000 acres of cotton. Rural families are worried as numerous health studies have established links between 2,4-D exposure and birth defects, hormone disruption and cancers like non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

While Dow says it has developed a less drift-prone formulation of 2,4-D, the older, highly volatile formula is still widely available and its lower cost creates a powerful market incentive to continue its use. We know from experience that regardless of idealized "best practices" and label instructions, *drift happens*.

USDA plants its head deep in the sand

Over the past year, USDA has proven itself adept at dodging responsibility. In its draft, the agency carefully explained that it's required to approve any GE organism considered unlikely to



Scientists warn that 2,4-D-resistant crops will lead to dramatically increased use of the hazardous herbicide, threatening neighboring crops and creating unnecessary health risks to farmers and rural communities.

pose a plant pest risk (that is, cause disease or damage to other plants). This deliberately narrow approach virtually guarantees GE crop approvals, even though increased herbicide use will have catastrophic effects on non-GE crops, people and rural farming economies.

USDA then passed the buck to U.S. EPA, explaining that EPA has sole responsibility for approving the "new uses" of 2,4-D that will accompany commercialization of Dow's 2,4-D seeds. In other words, *not USDA's problem!*

What USDA completely failed to consider—after painting a bizarre doomsday scenario of farming without 2,4-D crops—is that an immensely rich realm of sustainable weed management options already exists. And these successful practices don't rely on chemical herbicides at all. Unlike what Dow and Monsanto would have us believe, ramping up the pesticide treadmill—promoting reliance on more use of ever more hazardous chemicals—is not the path forward.

TAKE ACTION Sign PAN's petition to USDA, urging the agency to fulfill its responsibility to farmers and rural communities and say no to Dow's 2,4-D crops at www.panna.org/stop-ge-seeds.

Dr. Marcia Ishii-Eiteman is a senior scientist and director of Grassroots Science at PAN. Her specialties include ecological pest management.

Innovating for Healthy Soil and Healthy People

Daphne Miller is a family physician, writer and Associate Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. In her latest book, *Farmacology: What Innovative Family Farming Can Teach Us About Health and Healing*, Miller discovers how learning from sustainable farmers can make her a better doctor.



Dr. Miller approaches medicine with the idea that opportunities for health and healing are found not only in the medical system but also in such unexpected places as home kitchens, school gardens, community organizations, spiritual centers, farms and nature trails. Her first book, *The Jungle Effect*, chronicled what she learned about nutrition in travels to traditional communities around the globe.

Farmacology describes Dr. Miller's conversations with seven farmers who use ecological farming methods. They have two things in common: their creativity and innovation in farming, and their view of themselves as healers with the health of their community as their primary focus.

What I began to realize is that every choice that is made on the farm, from seed to farming method to how the soil is treated, has an enormous impact on our health. In fact, one might argue that decisions made by farmers have a much greater influence on our health than the decisions made by doctors and other people in the health professions.

Miller's insight is that farming methods not only affect health, they also serve as paradigms for understanding the health care system. One chapter in *Farmacology* explores how a model for Integrated Pest Management has inspired a novel approach to cancer care. Another chapter looks at how a pastured egg operation can offer us new approaches to handling stress in our lives.

Why are such innovations needed? Because of the chronic health problems caused by factory farming and what she calls "industrial or factory medicine."

When you look at the 20th century history of both medicine and farming, you realize that they co-evolved thanks to the technologies that were developed around the two world wars. Nitrogen fixation allowed for the development of explosives; it also led to the development of fertilizers. Similarly, tear gas led to pesticides and chemotherapy, and antibiotics found a role in both these sectors. Now genetic engineering is pushing both fields to new technological heights. Of course some of these breakthroughs have been lifesaving, but they have also contributed to most of our modern health woes.

Our epidemic of obesity, diabetes and heart disease is linked to an abundance of corn, soy and wheat produced on industrial farms. We have widespread bacterial, viral and fungal resistance from antibiotic and pesticide overuse. We have a nutrient-depleted food supply from chemically treated soil. And we are seeing an increase in cancers, lung disease and other chronic ailments associated with the chemical byproducts of Big Farm and Big Pharma.

Farmacology profiles creative farmers who are proving it's possible to grow crops with ecologically sound farming methods—and also offers examples of physicians beginning to take an ecosystem approach to human health. "Many people are referring to this as a One Health approach," says Dr. Miller, "and I am glad that PAN is doing its part."

ON THE WEB For the full interview, see www.panna.org/pan-conversation-daphne-miller.

Support a healthy and fair food system by becoming a Sustainer

Join the PAN Sustainers Circle by pledging a regular monthly or quarterly donation to ensure PAN's success in the coming year.

Pledging provides reliable funding and shows your commitment to a resilient and fair food system, grounded in science and rooted in our commitment to justice and equity.

Pledge \$10 a month or more, and we'll thank you with a copy of *Farmacology*. For more information, see www.panna.org/donate.

OUR MISSION

30+ YEARS **Pesticide Action Network North America** **90 COUNTRIES**

works to replace the use of hazardous pesticides with ecologically sound and socially just alternatives. As one of five PAN Regional Centers worldwide, we link local and international consumer, labor, health, environment and agriculture groups into an international citizens' action network. This network challenges the global proliferation of pesticides, defends basic rights to health and environmental quality, and works to ensure the transition to a just and viable society.

Why So Secret? continued from page 1

to widespread opposition to a trade agreement, then that trade agreement should not be the policy of the United States.” Representative Allan Grayson (D-FL), who has seen the draft TPP, says it “hands the sovereignty of our country over to corporate interests.” Many Republicans agree.

Protecting “investor rights”

The specifics we’re learning, thanks to Wikileaks, include a not-surprising theme of prioritizing increased profits over human need. For example, the current TPP draft would dramatically undermine the ability of countries to provide access to life-saving medications, and—according to Doctors Without Borders—would “severely restrict access to affordable medicines for millions of people.” The environment chapter opens the door for undoing national laws that protect forests and fisheries. A proposed TPP court system will protect the rights of multinational corporations over the public interest, just as the Investor-State Dispute Settlement provision of NAFTA has done. In case after case, foreign corporations—including several of the Big 6 pesticide and GE seed companies like Monsanto—have sued governments for tightening environmental regulations or subsidizing local food production. And they’ve won multi-million-dollar payouts.

... and the food system?

Agricultural policy is woven throughout these deals, and if Fast Track succeeds, we won’t get to read most provisions until they are already signed. So far, we know the TPP would require all ratifying countries to allow animal and plant life to be patented. TAFTA would forbid “buy local” rules.

The TPP would also include a NAFTA-like elimination of virtually all tariffs on U.S. agricultural products, leading to commodity dumping and the subsequent dislocation of small farmers from their lands, as we’ve seen in Mexico. Food safety rules—including rules about pesticide residue levels, labeling of GE ingredients, or limitations on additives—could be challenged under the TPP court system.

The chief U.S. agricultural negotiator for the TPP is none other than former Monsanto lobbyist Islam Siddiqui. Knowing how Monsanto has viciously sued farmers over their GE seed



The TPP is the latest push for corporate control of resources and people that has led to high food prices and their volatility, loss of food self-sufficiency, loss of food culture, and food contaminated with pesticides.

— Sarojeni V. Rengam, PAN Asia/Pacific executive director

patents and poured millions into fighting GE labeling efforts, it’s easy to guess what Siddiqui is fighting for in the TPP.

Standing together

PAN International was founded 30 years ago in the belief that across oceans and national boundaries, we have a responsibility to each other. We stand with small-scale farmers and communities who are working to preserve their food systems, protect public health and pursue sustainability. PAN’s global network is aligned in opposing these latest schemes to hand over more power to the already too-powerful corporations.

We know enough not to support trade negotiations behind closed doors.

TAKE ACTION Send an email to Congress urging them to oppose Fast Track today at www.panna.org/stop-tpp. It’s an important start.

Connect Online

📧 Sign up for Action Alerts and the GroundTruth blog at www.panna.org/subscribe.

📧 Join us on Facebook  and Twitter 

