

Rudolf Kirst Reports from Westminster

Dacorum Environmental Forum 21.1.2010

Key points made by R. K.

14 Oct: G M Freeze A G M

A nationwide publicity push for GM crops and food has begun and will intensify. The Food Standard Agency has been asked by Downing Street to hold a 12-months' 'Dialogue on GM'.

25 Oct: Scientists for Global Responsibility A G M supports Rudolf's concern about GM crops and food as well as his critical view of Nuclear Power stations as expressed by the Chair. They are members of the G M Freeze.

5 Nov: Westminster Food and Nutrition Forum
'21st Century Farming in the UK'.

Rudolf raised the points that farming needed to be guided by ethical considerations and ^{that} there are problems about 'Roundup'. He contributed an article printed in the conference's proceedings about the 'Ethics in Farming' with a 'Global Perspective of GM'. This is attached.

12 Nov: The Soil Association: International Conference

'The Future of Food'

Rudolf made the statement, that ^{if} the present funding for wars and war-related research was channelled into ~~food~~ ^{food} and ~~education~~ ^{production and education} nobody would go short. This statement was well received by the audience.

21 Nov: Unlock Democracy & GM

My motion to scrutinise the democratic credentials of the forthcoming Food Standard Agency's 'GM Dialogue' and any NHS consultation on the 'Fluoridation of the public water supply' was carried under the umbrella motion of scrutinising any public consultations.

24 Nov: Westminster Food and Nutrition Forum

The Carbon Footprint of Farming'
Rudolf raised the subject of the Quality of ^{the} Soil and of 'Water Security' and his article on these topics was printed in the publication of proceedings. A copy is attached.

3 Dec: The Soil Association: 'The Impact of GM Crops on Pesticide Use and Seed Prices in America'

Dr. Charles Benbrook from the US showed that pesticide use had increased tremendously and so had the price of GM seed. Farmers were driven in a corner and superweeds became a major problem.

9 Dec: All-party Parliamentary Environment Group 'The Government's Low Carbon Industrial Strategy' with Lord Drayson, Minister of Science. Rudolf pointed out, that Nuclear power was of very dubious benefit even in the medium term.

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Ethics and Farming

No planning in agriculture and food security can be sustainable without ethical considerations as follows:

1. The Ethics of Intergenerational Responsibility

We are co-responsible for the quality of life for generations to come. This includes passing on healthy farmland, not contaminated with artificial fertilizers and pesticides, ensuring they can grow plenty of wholesome and nutritional crops and enjoy maximum crop diversity within a rich and balanced landscape.

2. The Ethics of Respect

Exercising a culture of respect is essential to food security. Such respect generates and maintains processes, which are wholesome and increase productivity.

3. Respect for food

Respect for food is paramount. One third of our food is wasted in this country. How much farmland, work and energy does this represent?

4. Respect for farmers

particularly smaller family farmers. They take much of the risks so that we can eat. Well motivated, respected and financially secure farmers are likely to produce more and better quality food in a well cared-for bio diverse farming environment.

5. Respect for the soil

enhances food production enormously. One fifth of farmland is contaminated by excessive use of fertilizers and one fifth of our soil is contaminated by excessive use of pesticides. Such land degradation is usually connected to intensive farming practices. With the relative scarcity of land for food security in the UK such loss is irresponsible and must be put right. We need to look at the quality of soil so that we can generate healthy and sustainable crops.

6. Respect for pollinating insects

directly affects our harvest. One third of crops depend on pollinating insects. These are in serious decline for a number of reasons. We need to improve the conditions of pollinating insects drastically.

7. Conclusion.

Ethics and farming are inseparable both in practical and human terms. I have highlighted only two aspects of the theme. There are several others. We need the political will to add ethical considerations to farming.

GM: A Global Perspective

There are many layers concerning a global perspective to GM. Below I highlight a sharp edge perspective, which I have researched.

1. A Gallup poll in 2005 in the USA found that 45% of respondents were opposed to the use of GM in agriculture and food production.
2. Canada has prohibited the introduction of GM wheat to stop it contaminating the country's entire wheat harvest.
3. In March 2008 a survey in which 1000 citizens throughout the 27 EU countries were asked about their attitudes towards the environment, found that 57% of respondents were apprehensive about GM and only 21% were in favour.
4. Several European countries have reservations about GM, particularly Austria and Hungary. In Germany the maize seed MONI 10 was recently withdrawn from being sown.
5. In the UK the Government of Scotland is firmly opposed to GM crops and so is Wales. In England many areas have declared their intention of having GM-free zones. The UK is still free from commercial farming of GM crops despite the fact that our government wanted to force it

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Darwin, the Soil and Re-thinking Food Production

At the keynote seminar of 24th November 2009 there was a call for a fundamental re-think on food production in terms of generating a new culture of farming. This implied that industrial and intensive farming, its rationale and politics has had its day being responsible for soil depletion and degradation and many other problems endangering food security.

A coherent and comprehensive analysis of food production cannot fail to identify that a healthy soil is the first step towards such a new paradigm.

Darwin already pointed the way in 1881 in his book 'The Formation of Vegetable Mould Through the Action of Worms'. Vegetable mould or humus, to which we would add manure, is a key to healthy soil and has direct relevance to global warming and the carbon footprint.

Humus-rich soil absorbs and retains moisture and rainwater significantly better than soil depleted of organic matter. It also captures carbon to a high degree reducing the carbon footprint.

All suitable organic waste should be turned into humus. Using such material for biofuel is depriving farmland of its potential health. The new revolution in food production and food security requires strategic planning for soil fertility as a starting point.

Water Security and Food Security

There is talk about water wars, progressive desertification of farmland, glacier water disappearing, wells drying out, exhaustion of aquifers, imbalances of rainfall in relation to seasons and geography, and of course global warming. Shortage of water has a direct effect on food security. Yet no substance seems to be wasted more than water. Consequently there is an urgent call for a coherent plan of water security. The motto will be 'catch it, collect it, use it, recycle it, direct it to where it is needed - but do not waste it'. In the UK we need a team of ingenious water engineers to put into practice water security implementation schemes covering a multitude of ways to catch rain and flood water for storage, distribution and use. This needs to be backed by national and local government policies. There is plenty of water in the UK. It needs to be harnessed.

Food security depends on water security.

Biography

Rudolf Kirst is a research networker linking national and local government agencies, research institutions, producers and non-governmental organisations with emphasis on environmental and human rights issues. He is an associate member of the All-Party Parliamentary Environment Group, an associate member of Scientists for Global Responsibility, member of Unlock Democracy, the Soil Association, the Biodynamic Agricultural Association and many others. He has engaged in various public consultations relating to GM and Nuclear Power and participated in the public hearing of 'Chardon LL' in 2000-2003, the public consultation 'GM Britain' and other events. Kirst's research contacts cover the EU and the USA. He was involved with the conference planning on 'The Science of Sustainable Agriculture' in 2009 at the EU Parliament, Brussels.

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unto our countryside illegally nine years ago. There was much opposition by scientists and the public.

What role for GM?

My research over the last 9 years has found the following:

1. There is no scientific evidence that the first generation of GM crops has been consistently superior to conventional ones, for instance in crop yield; that the new generation of GM crops will solve the looming food crisis or even the problems of dry and salty soils any better than conventional ones; that GM crops, GM food and herbicides like Roundup are safe for the environment or for animal and human health.
2. However there is scientific evidence that much of the science relating to the GM crops and food and relating to herbicides is hidden to peer review because of commercial confidentiality; that enormous sums of money are spent on the propaganda for GM crops and food; that six multinational chemical companies own about 80% of all crop seeds and attempt to control the whole food and feed market in the world; that GM farming dramatically reduces the historic crop diversity; that GM crops contaminate anything they possibly can with their artificial traits on farmland and in the wild.

We need to thoroughly examine the safety to the environment, to health and sustainability of new technologies such as GM and Nanotechnology so as not to burden future generations with permanent problems and disadvantages.

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