



Patenting of Seeds and Genetically Modified Organisms

Columban Missionaries serve economically poor and marginalized communities globally who both have been further impoverished by GMOs and also sought alternative farming practices through organic farming and sustainable farming mechanisms. We believe that we are called to both safeguard ecological biodiversity as revelation of God and to listen to Creation as it speaks to us through ecological crisis such as climate change.

Columban Concerns

GM Seeds Drive Smallholder Farmers Further into Poverty

Columbans have witnessed how economic policies from International Financial Institutions like the World Bank and countries like the United States have encouraged the use of genetically engineered crops. With the introduction of patented GE seeds, many farmers cannot save seeds, a practice used by small farmers for centuries. They are forced into debt by purchasing the patents to the seeds each year or to stop farming.

GM Seeds Increase the Use of Pesticides

We also know that pests eventually become resistant to the chemicals used in pest resistant plants. This means that GE crops actually use more pesticides, many of which are linked to cancer, fertility, learning and developmental disabilities, and older age diseases such as Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease.

Genetically Modified Organisms for Biofuels Harms Food Prices

The UN Special Envoy for the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, called the 2008 global food crisis a "massive violation" of human rights and a "silent tsunami" that pushed 100 million people into poverty and 30 million into hunger. The rise of biofuels is a key factor in food price spikes in recent years. Land traditionally used to grow food is now being used to grow fuel. Biofuels are produced from GM corn, soy, wheat, cotton, and oilseed rape.

Genetically Modified Seeds and the Industrial Food System Contributes to Climate Change

Monsanto has lobbied for carbon credits for its Roundup Ready crops on the basis that they do not need ploughing because they can be sprayed with herbicides. While not ploughing the fields leaves more carbon in the ground, the spread of soy monocultures in Latin America has caused deforestation which does add additional carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. Additionally the transport of industrial GM seeds, crops, and chemicals also contributes to climate change.



Columban Response

Guided by Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, and our missionary experience, Columbans work to develop new models of sustainable farming that better reflect God's image in creation. The following are few examples of our work related to Patenting of Seeds and GMOs.

Australia

Columbans partner with Church and Civil Society organizations to educate communities, schools, and parishes about the [ethical concerns](#) of seed patenting and dangers of GMOs.

Britain

Columbans work to raise awareness through [advocacy and education](#) on Patenting and GMO issues.

Chile

Columbans in Chile make connections between Patent/GMO issues and other environmental issues like [Water, Climate Change, and Extractive Industries](#).

Korea

Columbans in Korea worked with farmers to pass a law against GMOs there and stood in solidarity with Korean Farmers to oppose efforts in the [Korean Free Trade Agreement](#) to reintroduce GMOs.

Peru

Columbans have supported a [Seed Potato Agronomy Project](#) which offers alternative agricultural opportunities to a largely privatized food system in Peru.

Philippines

[The Negros Nine Foundation](#) was founded by Columbans which has as its priorities:

- Promoting Sustainable Agriculture
- Organic Farming, Protecting the Integrity of Creation,
- Enhancing Bio-diversity
- Global Warming Awareness
- Carbon Reduction, Alternative Energy
- Community-based Health Solutions
- Building and strengthening of Christian Communities (KKs)

United States

Columbans in El Paso, Texas, at the U.S.-Mexico Border started a [community garden](#) which now provides organic produce for migrants, veterans and other members of the local community. In Washington, D.C., the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach advocates for policies that ensure [Economic and Food Justice](#) for all people.



Columbans Call for:

A food system that honors Creation.

Increased pesticides and fertilizers both contribute to carbon emissions in their production and transportation. Pesticides are linked to a number of human health issues and also to the colony collapse of bees. GM seeds not only include pesticides in their development but will also need additional pesticides when the pesticide they contain no longer deters pests. Industrial agriculture for food and fuel requires immense deforestation that contributes to species loss and climate change. Organic farming is better for creation and can have higher productivity over time.

A stop to the use of food based biofuels.

The agribusiness industry promotes GMO seeds as the solution to the world's food needs, as well as claim that it has the answer to global warming in the form of biofuel production. In fact food based biofuels contribute to food speculation and food price spikes.

A food system that allows farmers to employ traditional farming practices.

By supporting indigenous and other traditional knowledge, we can protect cultures from disappearing and ensure the economic livelihoods of traditional farmers rather than forcing them to become dependent on GM seeds. Instead, more attention should be put in investing in traditional agriculture and helping get these products into the marketplace.

A food system that recognizes and empowers women.

Studies have shown that in many cases that when women have economic agency that their families are better off. Programs that support women in agriculture and allow them to send their children to school will increase development for the nation.