

## Monsanto's Shares Surge as its Drive to Force GM Crops into India Gathers Pace

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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*It was a case of Modi mania when Narendra Modi and his BJP 'swept' to power in last year's Indian general election. It was however hardly the sweeping endorsement from the voters that much of the corporate media liked to portray it as. The BJP might have took 282 of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha, but it 'swept' to power on only 31 percent of the vote.*

Parts of corporate India and the well-off middle classes nevertheless celebrated Modi's rise to Prime Minister in the belief that they would materially benefit from a 'Thatcherite-style' revolution (see [here](#)). And many ordinary folk also swallowed the PR about Modi's 'vibrant Gujarat' PR campaign, which has been shown to be anything but 'vibrant'.

Writing on the Countercurrents website, Rohini Hensman shows that GDP growth in Gujarat under Chief Minister Modi was nothing special compared with many other states in India and was supported by wholesale privatisation of public assets, which has in effect meant the state government abdicating responsibility for decision-making processes that impact millions of people's lives by handing them to elite interests (see [here](#)). In terms of poverty, rural population displacement, hunger, farmer suicides, corruption, disease and debt, Hensman demonstrates that under Modi the extreme economic neoliberalism practised was anything but a resounding success.

Now at the political helm nationally, Modi and his administration are helping to accelerate a process that could eventually result in the selling of the economic and social bedrock of the country - agriculture - to foreign GMO agribusiness, not least by pushing for open field trials of various GM food crops. (The BJP does not stand alone here, though, as the process was gathering pace under the previous Congress-led administration and Veerappa Moily near the end.)

Some might find it perplexing that a nationalist outfit like BJP would appear willing to hand over food sovereignty and security to foreign agribusiness, such as US giant Monsanto, which seeks to secure control over the supply and growing of seeds and thus the global food chain (for example, see [this](#)). (The GMO issue is ultimately about geopolitics, seed freedom and food democracy, see [here](#).)

Investigative journalist and geopolitical analyst Kasli Shelley has outlined the makeover that Modi received from the US-Israeli led APCO Worldwide, a major 'global communications, stakeholder engagement and business strategy' company. Kalsi shows that APCO is well connected to the US/Israeli establishment, helping to promote militaristic policies, economic neoliberalism and the overall strategies of and engagements between governments and powerful corporate interests across the globe (see Kasli's piece on APCO [here](#)).

This is who Modi has previously partnered with to promote Gujarat as 'vibrant' and thus himself as potential PM material. There was the suspicion that once in power, Modi would become the go-to man for foreign corporate interests, especially those which are part of the extensive APCO network (and that includes Monsanto).

Facilitating powerful Western corporations' entry into India is not unique to the current administration. The Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture helped the likes of Monsanto, Archer Daniel Midland, Cargill and Wal-Mart's push into India's seed, trade and retail sectors in return for concessions in the nuclear field (see [here](#)).

Under the Modi-led administration, however, there is a stated commitment to clear away 'blockages' that the previous administration was unwilling or unable to do and would no doubt hinder the type of economic neoliberalism Modi presided over in Gujarat. And it is increasingly apparent those 'blockages' include smoothing the way for the entry of GM crops.

### **Ignoring all the evidence and warnings**

Writing in The Hindu last year, Aruna Rodrigues noted that the Technical Expert Committee (TEC) Final Report (FR) is the fourth official report exposing the lack of integrity, independence and scientific expertise in assessing GMO risk (see [here](#)). The four reports are: The 'Jairam Ramesh Report' of February 2010, imposing an indefinite moratorium on Bt Brinjal, overturning the apex Regulator's approval to commercialise it; the Sopory Committee Report (August 2012); the Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) Report on GM crops (August 2012) and the TEC Final Report (June-July 2013). There is a remarkable consensus here.

The TEC recommended an indefinite moratorium on the field trials of GM crops until the government devised a proper regulatory and safety mechanism. No such mechanism exists, but open field trials are being given the go ahead, regardless of a history of blatant violations of biosafety norms, hasty approvals, a lack of monitoring abilities, general apathy towards the hazards of contamination and a lack of institutional oversight mechanisms (see [this](#)).

The BJP-ruled Maharashtra government has just granted 'no-objection certificates' for GM open-field trials of rice, chickpeas maize, brinjal and cotton. Some regard this as a game changer in the push to get GM crops into India. (Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Andhra Pradesh have given NOCs for field trials of some biotech crops, while states like Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have banned such research activities.)

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, the Coalition for GM Free India posted the following on its website:

"In the wake of media reports about the Maharashtra Govt granting No Objection Certificates (NOCs) for the open air field trials of GM crops in the state, the Coalition for a GM Free India along with the Coalition for a GM Free Maharashtra has sent a letter... to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra urging him not to overlook the growing scientific evidence on the adverse impacts of GM crops as well as the public opposition to it. The fact that the announcement regarding approvals of field trials was made on the sidelines of an event arranged by the International biotechnology industry lobby group, ISAAA, shows in a way the influence International biotech giants like Monsanto as well as their Indian promoters have in every government. Besides this there seems

to be no basis on which these open trials could be permitted at a time every other credible agency be it the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture or the Supreme Court appointed Technical Expert Committee or the TSR Subraminiam committee appointed by the Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change to look into environmental laws in the country have cautioned against any open release of GMOs at this juncture... ” (see [here](#))

The negative health, environmental and potential dangers of GM crops (not least the surrendering of food sovereignty and security to Western agribusiness and the US) have been well documented (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), while those who legitimately oppose and campaign against GMOs are smeared and portrayed by India’s internal intelligence agency as working against the ‘national interest’ (see [here](#)).

Monsanto and the GM biotech sector forward the myth that GM food is necessary to feed the world’s burgeoning population. It is not (in India’s case, see [this](#) and [this](#)). Aside from a report from GRAIN ([here](#)) that concluded small farms family/peasant farms are more productively efficient than large industrial-scale farms and that the former can (and virtually does) feed the world, the World Bank-funded International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge and Science for Development Report also stated that smallholder, traditional farming can deliver food security in low-income countries through sustainable agro-ecological systems

By attempting to sideline opposition and ignoring expert advice and credible evidence pointing to potential catastrophic consequences if India were to adopt GM crops that it doesn’t even need, no one can be in any doubt that there is an agenda at the highest level to push GMOs into India at any cost. It is clear the ‘national interest’ and (foreign) ‘corporate interest’ are being conflated (see [here](#)).

### **Agribusiness setting the agenda**

If politicians fail to sanction GMO trials, there is a habit that they will be replaced until one of them does (see [here](#)). Backed by the US State Department (see [here](#)) and parts of the Indian political(-intelligence) elite (as alluded to above), the GMO agribusiness sector has gained a strategic and influential foothold in India and many of its national public bodies. Along with US food processing giants Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland, it threatens to destroy the rural economy by recasting it (and thus Indian society, given that hundreds of millions depend on it for a living) according to its own needs. This would mean moving over 600 million who depend of agriculture and local food processing activities into urban areas (as foreign interests move in), which currently employs tens of millions in cottage industry-type enterprises.

Consider that the number of jobs created in India between 2005 and 2010 was 2.7 million (the years of high GDP growth). According to Internatiional Business Times, 15 million enter the workforce every year (see [here](#)).

In APCO’s India Brochure, there is the claim that India’s resilience in weathering the global downturn and financial crisis has made governments, policy-makers, economists, corporate houses and fund managers believe that India can play a significant role in the recovery of the global economy in the months and years ahead. APCO describes India as a trillion dollar market. The emphasis is not on redistributing the country’s wealth among its citizens or the empowerment of farmers, but on positioning international funds and facilitating

corporations' ability to exploit markets and extract profit the best way they can.

In the mainstream media and among many politicians and economists, this constitutes growth and development, but it is neither. It is financial-corporate plunder under the guise of 'globalisation'. The evidence doesn't lie. In the West, decades of such policies have culminated in austerity, disempowerment and increasing hardship for the masses and the concentration of ever more wealth and power in the hands of the few.

The evidence doesn't lie where global agriculture is concerned either. Last year, the Oakland Institute stated that the first years of the 21st century will be remembered for a global land rush headed by institutional investors (the kind of entities that 'global communications and business strategy companies' deal with to 'facilitate 'stakeholder engagement' and 'position funds' to 'exploit markets') of nearly unprecedented scale, often at the expense of local food security and land rights (see [here](#)).

Small farmers are currently squeezed onto less than a quarter of the world's farmland and the world is fast losing farms and farmers through the concentration of land into the hands big agribusiness and the rich and powerful. According to the report GRAIN (referred to earlier), the concentration of fertile agricultural land in fewer and fewer hands is directly related to the increasing number of people going hungry every day.

US agribusiness via the World Bank/IMF/WTO has for some time been eyeing Indian agriculture as a cash cow for themselves (see [here](#)), and the Modi-led administration is promoting GMO biotechnology as business investment opportunity for foreign companies under the trendy-sounding 'Make in India' campaign. The political subjugation of India by the US partly rests on Monsanto's overriding control of the nation's agriculture (see [here](#)). Monsanto already dominates the cotton industry in the country and is increasingly shaping agri-policy and the knowledge paradigm by funding agricultural research in public universities and institutes (see [here](#)). Moreover, public regulatory bodies are now severely compromised and riddled with conflicts of interest where decision-making over GMOs are concerned, as outlined by Aruna Rodrigues in her article in The Hindu (referred to earlier).

Responding to the decision to sanction the field trials in Maharashtra, Monsanto India shares jumped 18 percent on Monday 2 February and the company was headed towards its biggest daily gain since September 2014.

Mark Halton, head of Global Marketing and Communications for Monsanto has praised APCO for helping the GMO giant to:

"... understand how Monsanto could better engage with societal stakeholders surrounding our business and how best to communicate the social value our company brings to the table." (see [here](#))

As far as powerful corporations are concerned, not least big agribusiness, it is increasingly clear that Modi is the go-to man. But that's what some in India feared all along.

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