



Photo Credit: Erik Buckham, Palaceworks

TRACTORS AND PLANES RAIN DOWN PESTICIDES IN POST-WWII AGRICULTURE IN THIS ANIMATION ABOUT SUPER BUGS AND WEEDS.

IS THIS THE END OF REAL FOOD?

GMO OMG

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When people first hear about just the basic facts concerning Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs or Genetically Engineered Foods) – the DNA of seeds altered with genes from other organisms like bacteria so food crops can withstand herbicides that will kill all other plants, patented by giant chemical companies and found in 80% of processed foods – the standard response is “Oh, my God.” For some, it’s just an exclamation, but for others, I imagine, it’s the beginnings of a prayer. There’s a mixture of horror and disbelief, as if finding out we’re living inside a very strange sci-fi novel. Beyond that, it’s the sting of humiliation from being ignorant about something so big, mixed with the anger that comes from feeling like you’ve been duped.

Even without understanding what a GMO is or why it matters, most of us believe as citizens of a supposedly free and democratic society that we have the right to know if GMOs are in the food we eat. The fact we don’t know, and that our right to know has been taken away by corporate greed and government collusion, should upset and mobilize people. When all the food and seed and water and air is owned and patented by giant multinational corpora-

tions, will we even protest? Do we have the wakefulness and willpower to take that first step and stand up for this basic right?

That central question is why a tiny story from Haiti impacted me so deeply and inspired me to make a film about this hidden takeover of our food and the world’s seeds. Months after the horrific earthquake that leveled Port-au-Prince, ten thousand rural farmers marched in the streets against Monsanto. In the midst of their hardships, these farmers rejected seeds donated to Haiti by the giant agrochemical company, crying out “Down with Monsanto!” They symbolically burned Monsanto’s seeds which represented slavery, debt and the extinction of their own seeds and way of life. They stood unified in their fight for food sovereignty and native seeds as a common inheritance of all humanity.

I kept asking myself “What do they know that we don’t?” Having long suffered, they possess courage and conviction that we have never even begun to arouse in ourselves. We haven’t known that we needed this courage or conviction because most of us didn’t even realize there was a fight on our hands for the future of food, our right to choose and the health of the environment and our families.

After a long drive north from the ruins and tent cities of Port-au-Prince into the treeless mountains, and then hours further to Hinche and Papaye, I remember my very first conversation with Chavannes Jean Baptist, the leader of the Peasant Movement of Papaye (MPP). He began with a big smile on his face, saying “The objective of Monsanto is not to make money. The objective of Monsanto is not the quality of food that people are eating. Monsanto’s objective is not to protect life. It’s not to protect the environment.”

Chavannes’ smile then disappeared, replaced with passion and urgency: “When people like me say these types of seeds are poisonous, when I say these seeds are destroying the life of the land and destroying the people, that’s when I attack the interest of Monsanto.”

He cut to the heart of the issue, and it was right there in the open for everyone to see. The agrochemical industry spews lies just like the lead and tobacco industries did before them; and we believe them until the truth finally bursts forth, usually from the work of brave scientists, researchers, professors and activists who risk their careers and reputations to go against the status quo.

Monsanto says they’re all about farmers, and yet the company has sued hundreds in court and bullied thousands with its mass of lawyers and private investigators. The biotech industry says we need GMOs for higher yield, and we need that higher yield to feed the world, but, for anyone paying attention, that is the furthest thing from the truth. The facts on the