



An Interview with Dr Vandana Shiva: On the Dangers of GMOs

During the Seed Festival in Iphofen, Germany, on 15 February 2014, Ulrike Mueller of MeinKitzingen.de met with Dr Vandana Shiva for an interview. Dr Shiva, born in the valley of Dehradun, India, in 1952 is a physicist (quantum theory) and has been an activist in the fields of seed diversity, protection of the environment and eco-feminism for many years.

Dr Shiva, what was your reaction when you heard about the outcome of the vote on Tuesday, 11 February, in the EU Commission on maize 1507?

My reaction to it is not of surprise because I know how hard the GM-industry tries and its an attempt for them to undo the bans and the moratoria. Because wherever there is democracy, no one wants GMOs and these are their attempts to corrupt the processes of democracy. For me it is a big disappointment that Germany abstained because Germany has been a leader in the GMO-free movement. I remember the last time I was in this region, I'd been called by farmers of Bavaria. They had expected 300 farmers. More than 5000 came. After that the government had to ban the MON810.

Wherever there is democracy, there is a no. More countries have said no than ever before. And Germany which should be leading that no is abstaining. So I think the Germans have to worry about how their democratic institutions have been corrupted.

What would you say to the German government?

I would say to the German government: Shame on you!

At a time where every responsible government and every responsible citizen are being asked to work to protect diversity and the earth, for you to work at the service of corporations which are destroying this planet is shameful.

What are the big risks and dangers of GMOs?

I think the first big danger is the monopolies. It's a political danger. If the first link in the seed web is controlled by five companies, then the most fundamental aspect of life, our food, our eating, is controlled. So it's a dictatorship.

So exerting control through food?

Yes. During the Vietnam war, Henry Kissinger had said: "We must control the food. We must use food as a weapon. And when we use food as a weapon, we control people". I would take it further: controlling seed means controlling all life, not just people. So it's the deepest kind of democracy violation you can imagine.

Are there other risks and threats linked to GMOs?

The second big threat is the threat to biodiversity. As we've seen, there are only four crops that have been genetically modified. But because for every acre planted, there are royalties that flow back to the companies, they are pushing more and more GMOs. None of this is protecting biodiversity. It is destroying it.

The third big threat is the fact that we know the harms. And in order to push GMOs, lies get told. I find that a pollution of the mind. There is pollution of our minds through the myth that without GMOs the world will starve. GMOs don't produce more. GMOs have failed to increase yields. We've done a report from Navdanya and it's available on our [website](#). It's called "The GMO Emperor has no Clothes". And just like the naked emperor marched around and everyone was told "If you are stupid, you won't see the clothes. Intelligent people can see the clothes", nobody wanted to be stupid. So everyone clapped for the naked emperor till a child who didn't have to pretend to be intelligent just said exactly what he saw. We have to be children who can speak the truth.

The fourth danger is the danger to health. Safety is being manufactured by the GMO-companies, with the same totalitarian attitude that is making them pass laws to prevent farmers from growing the kind of diversity we see here at this festival. But while one bad thing happened, the approval of the Pioneer maize [maize 1507], that is a bad thing, a good thing happened: the EU Commission sent back the EU seed law which would have made this diversity illegal.

What can consumers do?

Consumer can be part of the movement for saving seeds and saving diversity.

But how can consumers really opt out of genetically modified food when we don't have a labelling duty on animals fed with GMOs?

Yes. I know when the states fail to protect the interests and freedoms of their citizens, the citizens have to work to protect that freedom themselves. The best way to avoid GMOs is to know the organic farms and farmers who have produced GMO-free food. There are enough farms with free-range animals now, there are enough seed-savers. The beauty of biodiversity is: the more you eat it, the more you have it.

So I think it is time for consumers to live food democracy. And they live food democracy by finding the farmer who is saving seeds, finding the farmer who is using GMO-free crops or animals, finding the farmer who can be your guarantee for real safe and good food. Either we will be in the hands of corporations or we will create our freedom through building a food community.

Thank you so much, Dr Shiva, for the interview.