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Starved for Science: How Biotechnology Is Being Kept Out of Africa

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Foreword by Norman Borlaug and Jimmy Carter

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In addition to lack of consumer benefits and uncontrolled exposure, citizens in rich countries today tend to disapprove of GMO foods and crops because of what they think this new technology will do to farming. In rich countries today because farmers are already highly productive (perhaps too productive, as Margaret Mellon suggests) new scientific applications that could bring still more productivity have become suspect and stigmatized. Well before GMO foods and crops came along, citizens in rich countries had already become concerned about earlier applications of modern agricultural science such as high-yielding crops grown with heavy applications of chemical fertilizers or pesticides. Citizens had come to see too much agricultural science as moving modern societies away from something they liked – traditional small-scale family farms working in harmony with nature – and instead toward a distasteful “factory farming” model that treated the growing food as just another industrial enterprise. (pp. 33-34).

...4 Keeping Genetically Engineered Crops Out of Africa

...*Conclusion* – An Imperialism of Rich Tastes

“...Particularly in Africa, the embrace of ‘extreme precaution’ when regulating GM crops is what has kept this technology away from farmers so far.

In its regulatory approach to GMOs, Africa has been following Europe rather than the United States. The United States decided to regulate GMOs for food safety and biosafety using the same statutes in place for conventional crops and foods, but Europe took a different path by creating a legally separate and more demanding system for GM crop regulation (Jasanoff 2005). **In part this reflected a more general European preference to regulate production processes as well as products, but it also reflected new moves in Europe toward embracing what is called the ‘precautionary principle,’ an approach that allows governments to keep new technologies off the market even if positive evidence of a risk has not been found. Scientific ‘uncertainty’ about the effect of a technology is all that is required to trigger formal disapproval.** In practice, resolving every possible uncertainty about a technology’s effects is an endless and impossible task; if the precautionary principle were

consistently applied (and it never is), it would advise us to ‘never do anything for the first time.’ I indicated in Chapter 1 that Europe does not embrace the precautionary principle consistently across all technologies, since medical GMOs are given swift approval even when considerable scientific uncertainty remains as to their long-term or side effects. **Only when a technology is not needed by Europeans – such as GM crops – is it likely to get the full precautionary treatment. If the anticipated local benefit is not compelling, a new technology can be slowed down in Europe by what Lawrence Kogan has called an ‘administratively created presumption of possible harm’ (Kogan 2005, p. 5).**

(pp. 118-119)

...Whenever the European Union tightens the product-safety and production-process standards it now imposes on its own domestic firms, private companies abroad seeking to maintain access to the European market must adjust to this new standard as well. The European Union is the big customer, and the customer is always right. Because of the importance of its import market, Europe’s high regulatory standards are gradually becoming like a new global norm. In 2003, A *Wall Street Journal* article complained, ‘Americans may not realize it, but rules governing the food they eat, the software they use and the cars they drive increasingly are being set in Brussels’. (Mitchner 2003).

Private firms even in the United States can find it inconvenient to have to adjust to European rules. In a 2005 study titled, ‘Exporting Precaution,’ Lawrence A. Kogan argued that Europe’s pursuit of a ‘risk-free regulatory agenda’ has become, through the trading-up mechanism, a significant new burden on business expansion options in the United States (Kogan 2005).

(p. 182)

...REFERENCES

...Kogan, Lawrence A. (2005). *Exporting Precaution: How Europe’s Risk-Free Regulatory Agenda Threatens American Free Enterprise*, Washington, D.C.: Washington Legal Foundation.

(p. 209); (See also, p. 229)