

05-03-21

Dick Taverne contre le fondamentalisme écologique

Dans son livre *The March of Unreason*, Dick Taverne nous invite à nous méfier du fondamentalisme écologique. D'après lui, les arguments scientifiques des fervents de l'agriculture biologique sont sans fondement. Ils jouent sur l'émotionnel. Selon lui, il n'y a pas de réelle différence entre l'agriculture bio et la conventionnelle si ce n'est qu'elle coûte deux fois plus cher. Extrait en français d'un article paru dans *The Irish Independent*. Intégralité de l'article en anglais.

Source : AgBioWorld

Article du "Irish Independent", de critique du livre :

'The March of Unreason' by Dick Taverne is published by Oxford University Press, \$25.32

En français, quelques points de cet article.

Nous devons résister contre la marée du fondamentalisme écologique. Les seuls arguments de ces écologistes sont leur capacité à faire appel à l'émotionnel (aux peurs), à organiser des campagnes de presse et/ou de signatures, etc. Mais le fond scientifique est inexistant.

Toutes les nourritures sont "bios". L'étiquette est volée de force par une partie de l'industrie agroalimentaire... mais sans fondement réel. L'agriculture bio trouve ses racines chez le mystique allemand Rudolf Steiner, profondément anti-science.

La seule vraie différence entre la nourriture bio et la conventionnelle est que la bio coûte deux fois plus cher....

Au niveau de ressources de la planète, elle est un gaspillage énorme de surface et une atteinte à l'environnement.

La seule vraie contribution de l'agriculture biologique à l'agriculture durable est qu'elle entretient la pauvreté et la malnutrition.

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Organic Farming - A Growing Threat to The World ?

- Damian Corless, Irish Independent, March 16, 2005

'A new book claims we have a duty to our planet to resist the tide of dangerous 'eco-fundamentalism' sweeping the globe.'

It was a day when the phone operators at the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) were bombarded with queries from concerned callers. The authority fielded as many phone queries in a single day as it normally does in a month and its website received 22,000 hits instead of the usual 400. The public was in a tizzy having just learned that illegal cancer-causing agent Sudan 1 had made its way into the Irish food chain.

The Sudan 1 affair provided the organic lobby with a perfect parable for exposing the potential vices of today's mass-production food processes and for extolling the virtues of the natural alternatives. The potentially lethal toxin entered the food chain through a five-ton consignment of contaminated chilli powder imported into Britain. The powder was then added to almost 600 heavily processed products, many of them convenience foods. By the time the alert went out, the blighted foodstuffs were sitting on 4shelves across Europe, Canada and the United States.

In Britain the Sudan 1 scare raised troubling questions about whether that country's food watchdog, the Food Standards Agency (FSA), had acted in the best interests of the consumer. Critics accused it of being more concerned to quell any public panic than with taking urgent remedial action. In this country there have been repeated calls to split the Department of Agriculture & Food on the persuasive grounds that the one Department cannot wholeheartedly serve two masters, the producer (Agriculture) and the consumer (Food).

Seven years ago there seemed no doubt that the customer really was king when it came to food safety best practice. In 1998, in the face of widespread public hostility to genetically modified (GM) foods, the EU put a freeze on the approval of any new GM crops (although it allowed the continued use of 18 GM products already in circulation). The following year that moratorium seemed thoroughly vindicated when the so-called Frankenstein Foods scare flared up.

The monster was unleashed when ITV's World In Action interviewed Arpad Pusztai, a scientist who had been conducting research on rats fed with genetically modified potatoes. Pusztai claimed that the lab rats experienced stunted organ growth and a damaged immune system. He said he'd personally never eat GM food.

Pusztai's furious employers suspended him, accusing him of gross irresponsibility. GM conspiracy theorists had a field-day linking the US GM giant Monsanto, which had funded the research, to Pusztai's removal, claiming that sinister vested interests were trying to gag his attempts to warn the public.

The scare reached its height when an observant journalist spotted that several brands of baby foods contained GM ingredients, leading to a Sudan-1-scale total recall. When the dust had settled, Britain's Royal Society slammed Pusztai's research as shoddy and of no scientific worth, but by then the Frankenstein label had well and truly stuck.

But more recently, to the horror of food purists, there have been clear signs that the dawning of the GM Age was merely postponed back in 1998, rather than stopped. Last September, with individual EU states bitterly divided on the merits of GM crops, the European Commission stepped in to end its own ban, approving the use of 17 seed strains engineered by Monsanto. The move was steered through by Irish Commissioner David Byrne with the support of the Irish Government but, if the opinion polls are to be believed, against the wishes of 70% of the EU's population.

Presented with this fait accompli by our political masters, the only sensible thing for EU citizens to do now is to embrace our GM future. That's according to Dick Taverne, chairman of the UK body Sense About Science and author of a new book, *The March Of Unreason*, which claims that we have a duty to our planet to resist the tide of dangerous 'eco-fundamentalism' sweeping the globe.

Taverne's impeccable credentials as a dyed-in-the-wool Green include joining both Greenpeace and Friends Of The Earth in the 1960s and giving up his car for good in the '70s in favour of a bicycle. However, Taverne believes that a significant part of the Green lobby is now preaching a woolly, emotional, stupid and deeply damaging eco-fundamentalism. He says: "Instead of rational, evidence-based analysis of such issues as the potential risk of GM crops, extremist Green lobbies whip up a hue and cry against the whole technology, presented, with the help of the media, as the democratic response of the people."

"Research involving private funding is perceived as automatically suspect and the fashionable call for greater public control of science translates into more power for groups who claim to speak for the people but do not."

The media, says Taverne, are complicit in giving the scaremongers a platform to make Luddite claims that have no basis in scientific fact. He remarks: "No wonder the public doesn't want to eat GM food. Where else can it obtain its information about scientific developments except through the media? The lobbies calling for a ban on GM crops cite public hostility, which they themselves helped to create, as one of the principal justifications for imposing one."

Taverne reserves some of his most scathing criticisms for the organic lobby, which he accuses of pedalling "a myth". All food, he argues, is organic, but a billion-euro industry has hijacked the label and used it to flog a product that is supposedly fresher, better tasting, untainted with toxins and better for the natural world.

The trouble with organic food, says Taverne, is that when you sweep away the hype and hocus-pocus, the only thing that really distinguishes it from conventionally produced fresh food is that it costs twice as much. The organic movement, he tells us, was inspired early in the last century by the misguided mysticism of German philosopher Rudolf Steiner.

Steiner believed that cosmic forces entered animals like cattle and stags through their horns and he came up with a means of feeding the soil through a process of 'biodynamic cultivation', which involved burying cattle horns stuffed with entrails in the soil to nourish it. For best results the sowing of these cosmic horns should be synchronised with the phases of the moon. He taught his followers that chemical fertilisers damaged the human nervous system and the brain, instilling the belief which persists to this day that nature knows best and science is dangerous.

As he broadens his attack, Taverne cites a British report from last year which pronounced that: "On the basis of current evidence organic food is not significantly different in terms of food safety and nutrition from food produced conventionally."

Addressing claims that we should eat organic food because the pesticide residues on conventional crops are harmful, he says: "There is a disparity between public fears and the facts. Dietary contributions to cardiovascular disease and cancer probably account for more than 100,000 deaths a year (in the UK), food poisoning for between 50 and 300. There are no known deaths from pesticide residues or GM foods. A cup of coffee contains natural carcinogens equal to at least a year's worth of carcinogenic synthetic residues in the diet. If people are worried about the effect of pesticides in farming on wildlife or human health, they should promote pesticide-resistant GM crops, which reduce their use."

He quotes blind tasting tests as showing that consumers cannot tell the difference between organic and conventional foods once both are fresh and he claims that GM farming, which requires less tillage of the land, is more beneficial to birds and wildlife than organic farming.

Ultimately, however, Taverne claims that organic farming is far too inefficient to provide for the planet's future. He says: "Organic food costs more because average yields are 20-50% lower than those from conventional farms. This inefficiency is highly relevant to the hungry and the poor.

"While there may be food surpluses in some areas, we need to treble food production in the next 50 years to feed three billion extra people and meet higher living standards at the same time. We face an increasing shortage of water and of good agricultural land.

"In many places the only way inefficient organic farmers can feed an expanding population is by cutting down more tropical forest. Every form of technology that increases efficiency in farming will be needed to contribute to the production of more food.

"What contribution can organic farming make? In the words of the Indian biologist CS Prakash, its only contribution to sustainable agriculture will be to sustain poverty and malnutrition."

This one is going to run and run.

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