

## The Future Control of Food: a guide to international negotiations and rules on intellectual property, biodiversity, and food security

edited by Geoff Tansey and Tasmin Rajotte

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review by GRAIN

**S**ocial movements and activists who want to defend food sovereignty will want to read this book. It shows how intellectual property systems have been imposed, improperly in the view of many people, on food systems that depend on natural resources and local knowledge. It is a readable but disturbing narrative which juxtaposes detailed descriptions of the systems that privatise nature with examples of peoples' defence of agricultural biodiversity, that component of biodiversity that has co-evolved with and has been developed by people for our food.

The legal system of Intellectual

Property Rights – not 'rights' in any vital humanitarian sense, but what the editors of this book call monopoly privileges – are one of the barriers to realising food sovereignty. As they highlight, intellectual property regimes are a new factor in most countries, along with a changing trade regime and new agreements on biodiversity. It is these that are likely to shape agricultural development in the future.

The book chronicles the systemic perversion of legal systems to advance the interests of those intent on controlling our food system without liability for social and environmental costs. In so doing, it

unmasks the collusion of governments and governance structures in providing disembodied corporations with monopoly privileges over life and the consequent bankrolling of the biotech engine.

A dozen authors cover all the key negotiations concerning IPRs. Ten chapters cover the rules governing IP, global processes, agreements and prospects. It is a thoroughly researched book, evidenced by more than 15 pages of carefully chosen references that cover official, academic and grey literature. For those who want to defend food sovereignty, it is essential reading.

### La bataille des OGM: Combat vital ou d'arrière-garde?

Birgit Müller

Ellipses (France), 2008, 173 pages

review by GRAIN

**I**n this book, Birgit Müller, an anthropologist and researcher with LAOIS-CNRS, Paris, takes us to the heart of the political struggle surrounding genetically modified foods, deftly describing the profound clash between the vision of proponents and that of opponents. The book focuses on Europe, and France in particular, where Müller is active within social movements, but Müller also draws examples from around the world. Through her exploration of the situation in France, she is able to highlight the fundamental elements of the struggles

against GMOs and the underlying reasons why they are so aggressively promoted. She finds the same logic at work in many different parts of the world.

Müller's book will be useful as a reference text for experienced activists and as an introductory text for those less familiar with the issue. It provides clear basic explanations of what GMOs are and the key points of controversy (such as the notion of "substantial equivalence", the precautionary principle and the patenting of life) and smoothly draws the reader

into the deeper questions at stake. Müller's discussion of contamination and liability and the efforts of people to assert and defend democratic control over a technology that raises profound social questions are particularly well done. She also provides us with a clear explanation of the beliefs and interests that underlie support for GMOs. By the end, the reader will come away with a deep understanding of why the struggle against GMOs is so vital and with valuable wisdom about how to pursue it.

### Stuffed and Starved: Markets, Choices and the Battle for the World's Food System

Raj Patel

Portobello Books, 2007, 438 pages

review by GRAIN

**I**n *Stuffed and Starved*, Raj Patel weaves together a solid story of the corporate takeover of the world's food system. The book brings out the key mechanisms through which this transformation has come to pass – from the Green Revolution to trade agreements to the rise of supermarkets. Patel exposes the deep inequalities and contradictions of today's food system and its brutal impacts on most of the world's

farmers and consumers. He devotes much of the book to explaining how and why this system moves forward on the farm, showing us how decision-making has been effectively taken over by a small number of people in corporate circles. Although the book is somewhat targeted at Northern middle-class consumers, Patel is able to make links across a range of experiences, seamlessly drawing connections between such things as US

obesity levels and the North American Free Trade Agreement. Farmers' suicides and Brazil's landless movement become focal points through which we may reach a deeper understanding of the consequences of this system and the potential for it to be taken apart and built anew. As a follow-up to the book, Patel also runs a website and an interactive blog where he continues to expand on the issues covered in the book ([www.stuffedandstarved.org](http://www.stuffedandstarved.org)).

