



Seeds of **freedom**

Frequently Asked Questions!

If you're planning on holding a screening of Seeds of Freedom you may like to be armed with answers to some Frequently Asked Questions. Here are some of those which we've been asked since launching the film. If the discussion you have generates others, please do share them with us so that we can build on this and make it more useful for future screenings and viewers. Thank you and good luck!

What can I do?

Use your purchasing money and cast a vote for an ethical and just food system every time you shop! Make a choice to support independent, organic and local producers rather than buying chemically-grown monoculture crops. Get to know your local suppliers. In many countries such as the UK, you can join a veg-box scheme, or team up with neighbours to form a food co-operative; you'll find you can get fresh, quality, tasty food at a good price. It's fun to cook seasonally and see your diet change through the year, as Nature intended! In countries in the global North (such as the UK) it is easy to feel very disconnected from our food supply – but our power as consumers can be the most direct way to re-evaluate how we relate to our food. And when you choose to support seed freedom, even the weekly shop can be a powerful political act.

Keep talking about food sovereignty. Spread the word, spread the film; make it an issue that everyone knows about. Food is really something that we all have in common and can all get interested in. Keep an eye on the campaigns and what's happening in your area, and don't forget to tell others about Seeds of Freedom.

Tell your MP and your government that you want them to stand up to the GM giants and protect the independent farmers. When enough people express their feelings on an issue, politicians listen, and so policies change. Governments need to know there is a swell of support for the policies that defend seed sovereignty and biodiversity.

Think about growing your own food at an allotment site, in your garden or yard, or even in window boxes. And if you do grow food, go one step further by growing heritage varieties and saving your own seeds. This is the most direct way to conserve the independence, health and diversity of our food supply. Seed banks and seed swaps exist all over the world and are continuing the precious heritage of seed, in defiance of the corporations who want to control it.

Also what about making a small flyer to take away after screening? With websites for four 'what can I do' categories e.g. Buy, Grow, Learn, Campaign. Here are some suggestions, but you may have your own!

Buy – <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoops/> guide to food co-ops including setting them up, <http://www.safe-food.org/-consumer/shop.html> site with nice intro to GM plus overview of food shopping and other advice

Join - a local Transition Town initiative – many have food groups which are doing great work in communities around local food and seed saving. <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/>

Grow – seedy Sunday in UK <http://www.seedysunday.org/index.aspx> or join Garden Organic and become a heritage seed guardian: <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/> - similar heritage seed catalogues exist around the world

Campaign – GM Freeze <http://www.gmfreeze.org/> UK campaign group, Navdanya <http://www.navdanya.org/> Indian seed bank and active campaigners, Via Campesina <http://viacampesina.org/> global people's movement

Learn – <http://www.grain.org/> and global land-grab news <http://farmlandgrab.org/>

How can I find out more about seed saving?

Current seed laws in the UK and Europe make it illegal for seed to be sold unless it has passed certain requirements for Distinctiveness, Uniformity and Stability. This means that relatively few varieties make it through this expensive process, to be sold by seed companies. This is a major reason for disappearing diversity of seed varieties.

Fortunately, there are ways around this problem, and people and organisations doing great work to help keep seed diversity alive - with your help!

In the UK, Garden Organic (previously known as HDRA) have a wonderfully diverse heritage seed library. Members who join the organisation can choose a selection of seed varieties to grow. You are even welcome to become a "seed guardian" which means saving seed so that Garden Organic can send it on to other members. They offer a wealth of resources, information, advice and training for budding gardeners and seed savers.

Garden Organic <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/>
Real Seed Catalogue <http://www.realseeds.co.uk/terms.html>
Seedy Sunday <http://www.seedysunday.org/index.aspx>

What is food sovereignty?

Food sovereignty means creating democratic control over our food. It requires ethical, connected-up thinking and practice at every stage of the food system. Food Sovereignty is 'the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods'. In other words, food that takes into account the needs and health of ecosystems, soils, seeds and farmers, as well as the consumers.

Compare this to the trends in global agriculture today. Agriculture is causing huge damage to the land, while control becomes ever more concentrated in the hands of a few, and profit is the driving force. Food speculation and artificial shortages, rapid degradation of farming land and the decreasing nutritional value of our food are all symptoms of an unhealthy system. Food sovereignty is the cure – a way back to saner, more just and healthier production. Food sovereignty de-commercialises our right to good food, de-centralises the power in the food supply, and re-focuses our priorities. It is small-scale, independent and diverse, and it rejects the corporate takeover. Food sovereignty means making informed choices to support the many small-scale producers who, in spite of the GM pressure, still provide most of the world's food today.

Food sovereignty is an overarching vision of our food system shared by many different kinds of people working on food issues: small-scale farmers, organic gardeners, environmental NGOs, campaigners against supermarkets, pesticides and GMOs. Its 6 broad pillars clearly map out the kind of things that we want - and don't want - in our food systems.

You can find out more about food sovereignty and groups with whom you may like to connect by visiting Food Sovereignty UK or the global people's movement, Via Campesina. Read the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA's) report "Food Sovereignty Systems" <http://www.africanbiodiversity.org/system/files/images/AFSA%20Document.pdf>

Why did Gaia and ABN make this film?

This film is a response to GM lobbyists and policy makers in the North who frequently claim that GM is needed to feed Africa but ignore African farmers' views on the matter. As multinational companies from the West seek to gain profit from our food supply, Seeds of Freedom gives a voice to the small-scale farming communities in Africa and the South who are struggling to maintain their food sovereignty; their right to control of their own food. The African continent is already seeing the effects of climate change and will have some of the worst affected regions, as the climate grows more erratic. Now more than ever, farming communities will need their diverse, resilient and adaptable crops to face up to the new challenges. The GM lobby tells us GM is the only way to solve world hunger – but the crops they grow are used for biofuels, animal feed, cash crops or clothing – and famine and hunger are still growing. Seeds of Freedom is a call to celebrate and support the low-impact, small-scale producers whose work feeds 70% of the world. The film is a call to consumers to unite with producers and make the choice to support food sovereignty before it is too late.

The Gaia Foundation and the African Biodiversity Network have been working together on issues relating to the protection of biological and cultural diversity for over a decade. With a vast network of grassroots partners working directly with communities to revive and protect traditional practices of seed saving and to revive the traditional knowledge associated with farming and seed, Gaia and ABN were well placed to bring voices from the global south to an international audience. In doing so, we hope to help counteract the mantra that GM is the only way to feed the growing population and is being welcomed by farmers throughout Africa, India and Latin America.

What do Gaia and ABN do?

For more than 25 years the Gaia Foundation has been developing links with organisations worldwide with the aim of supporting and protecting diverse ecosystems and sustainable communities. Gaia's work challenges the false solutions of big business – such as GM seeds – and instead advocates for indigenous and long-term responses to the crises caused by disregarding Earth's delicate systems in the short-term. Gaia frequently hosts events in partnership with other organisations, and works closely with a number of groups, in Africa and elsewhere, to bring about real change on the ground. They were instrumental in founding the African Biodiversity Network (ABN).

ABN has 36 partners from 12 African countries. The network acknowledges the difficulties facing the continent today: the demands of a growing population, external pressures to open markets and free trade, and the need to protect the huge wealth of natural resources across the continent. ABN works on the premise that the solutions to many of the challenges facing Africa can be found by working closely with the land and within traditional and indigenous communities. They seek to be a strong voice in building resilient and confident communities across the continent. Along with The Gaia Foundation, the ABN support the Climate, Seed and Knowledge programme (CSK). Working directly with African farming communities, CSK puts seed sovereignty at the heart of community welfare. Farmers who have been made to feel that the indigenous methods are 'backward' or outdated compared to industrial agriculture techniques, can lose confidence in their own culture. When traditional knowledge is shared within and between communities, indigenous seed once again provides a resilient source of food, building confident and resilient rural communities.

Why was Jeremy Irons chosen to narrate the film?

Jeremy Irons has been a friend of The Gaia Foundation since the 80s. His role in the film *The Mission*, in which he played a Spanish Jesuit trying to protect a remote South American Indian tribe, made further connections between his interests and Gaia's work with indigenous communities in the Amazon. In 2011 Jeremy became a United Nations Food & Agriculture (UNFAO) Goodwill Ambassador. His concern with the industrial food system and with justice and equity in food meant that he was a perfect candidate to narrate *Seeds of Freedom*. His rich and recognisable voice is a wonderful addition to the film, and powerfully communicates this critical message.

Are all GM crops bad?

A strong criticism of GM crops focuses on issues of corporate control. The fact that commercially available GM crops are patented means that farmers are forbidden to save their seed, even if they have been accidentally cross-pollinated by neighbouring GM crops. Monsanto's GM seed domination over maize (corn), soya, canola and cotton in the US, Canada and Argentina, shows how one corporation can use the technology to effectively control and limit farmers' options.

GM technology also raises other concerns. For example, it is effectively impossible to prevent wind and insects from carrying pollen from GM crops to neighbouring plants. Thus crops that are supposed to be non-GM may become contaminated with GM genes, making non-GM choices more difficult for consumers and for farmers wishing to save their seed. Studies show that GM crops can also cross-pollinate with weeds that are wild relatives, and we do not yet know what the consequences of this will be for ecosystems.

Independent studies suggest that there may also be serious health risks associated with GM foods. A recent 2-year feeding trial held in France investigated the impact of GM foods on rats, where the GM-fed rats developed a high incidence of large tumours. There is a strong possibility that inserting GM genes into genomes can lead to the production of new and unanticipated proteins and allergens in a plant. However there has been very little independent and peer-reviewed safety testing of GM on health and ecosystems.

There are also good reasons to be sceptical about the ability of GM technology to provide benefits to the South. For example, GM "golden rice" would require a person to eat several kilos a day in order to get the recommended daily allowance of Vitamin A. Meanwhile, GM "drought tolerant" crops have been developed using conventional breeding techniques to achieve the tolerance to drought, but with additional GM genes inserted in order to facilitate corporate patenting.

There are far better, safer, cheaper, easier and more effective non-GM options for farmers to increase crop nutrition or resilience to drought. ABN's work on Climate, Seed and Knowledge (CSK) is a clear example of this. Therefore GM technology is not just potentially harmful, it is simply not necessary.

For more information, see:

- GMO Myths & Truths: an evidence-based examination of the claims made for the safety and efficacy of genetically modified crops <http://earthopensource.org/index.php/reports/58>
- The GMO Emperor has no Clothes: a global citizens' report on the state of GMOs http://www.gaiafoundation.org/sites/default/files/documents/GMO%20EMPEROR_Report%20final.pdf
- "Safe" levels of GM Maize and Roundup can cause tumours http://research.sustainablefoodtrust.org/#_message