

# **INDIA'S FARMERS AGAINST THE GLOBAL AGRI-CARTEL**

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*CHRONICLING RESISTANCE TO  
CORPORATE ENCLOSURES*



**COLIN TODHUNTER**

# India's Farmers Against the Global Agri-Cartel

## Chronicling Resistance to Corporate Enclosures

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Agrarian Imagination Under Siege: India's Farmers Against the Global Agri-Cartel © 2026 Colin Todhunter

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## **About the Author**

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## **Note to the Reader**

This collection brings together 19 essays centred on India's agrarian crisis written between 2015 and early 2026. All the chapters were originally published as standalone articles or as a composite of several such pieces (see end note).

They are reproduced here without substantive revision, written during a decade of heightened contestation over agricultural policy, farmers' livelihoods, and the future of rural India. little has changed as we enter 2026.

The decision to reproduce these texts unchanged is deliberate. This open access e-book is intended as an archival record rather than a retrospective synthesis. The arguments, emphases and occasional repetitions reflect the moments in which the essays were written. No attempt has been made to update statistics or smooth shifts in tone or emphasis across time.

Maintaining these original elements preserves the essays as artifacts of their time, rather than modernising them into something they were not.

The persistence of certain themes across the collection—policy debates, agrarian distress, state withdrawal and farmer resistance—is not accidental. It reflects the structural nature of India's agrarian crisis and the limited extent to which its underlying dynamics have changed over the period covered here. In this sense, repetition is itself part of the record.

This collection serves as a single access point. It is intended that the text may be of use to researchers, activists and movements working on agrarian and food-system issues.

It conveniently brings together a selection of my writing on India previously scattered across several books, print publications and online platforms. As an archive, this collection is not necessarily intended to be read linearly from start to finish. Readers may wish to dip in and out. Each essay is self-contained.

And this is one of the reasons for the repetition that runs through some of the chapters—each article was written for an audience that may have had

limited prior knowledge of the issues at hand. Certain things, therefore, had to be restated. Repetition hopefully gives the collection added strength.

**While the essays focus on India, the questions they raise transcend national boundaries. The forces reshaping India's countryside—corporate capture of food systems, erosion of rural livelihoods and the struggle to defend local autonomy—are global in scope. Readers, wherever they may live, will recognise parallels in their own societies, as the same logics of commodification and control transform landscapes and lives across the world.**

The essays are broadly chronological but prioritise the 'long arc' of political consequences, occasionally drawing on earlier or later articles to provide context. They bring together writings from the period leading up to and during the farmers' protests of 2020–21 and the period following the repeal of the three farm laws (December 2021).

This volume is more than a record of economic struggle; it is a chronicle of a war on life itself, on our connection to nature and the land, on what it means to be human. Behind the memoranda of understanding and the digital control grids lies an attempt to strip the 'soul' from Indian agriculture and rural India. This archive documents the refusal of millions to be reduced to data points.

It is, in essence, the story of an attack on the 'Agrarian Imagination'—an ancient, resilient 'way of being' that is fighting to survive a 'bio-digital enclosure' designed to eradicate cultures, food sovereignty, self-sufficiency and autonomy. In effect, India's agrarian crisis is a civilisational crisis.

Embodying a spiritual practice in which humans cultivate a reciprocal, respectful relationship with the land, farming is an ethical and sacred engagement with the natural world. It becomes a spiritual act when we care for the land as a living partner rather than a mere resource to extract and exploit. (For further insight into this philosophy and how it applies to the development paradigm, download for free [\*The Agrarian Imagination: Development and the Art of the Impossible\*](#).)

**Note:** These articles appeared in various publications, including *The Beacon*, the *Centre for Research on Globalization*, *Countercurrents*, *CounterPunch*, *Deccan Herald*, *The Ecologist*, *Hampton Institute*, *Huffington Post*, *Janata Weekly*, *Outlook India (Poshan)* and the *Third World Network*. Also in the collection [\*Corporate Power Imperial Capitalism and the Struggle for Food Sovereignty\*](#).

## Kisan vs Corporate Raj

Created by Isa Esasi, this artwork encapsulates the central theme of the book—the confrontation between global corporate and institutional forces shaping the food system and the farmer who stands for autonomy and agrarian justice. It symbolises the struggle over who controls land, seeds and livelihoods in a world increasingly dominated by financial and technological empires. Behind every statistic, policy and trade agreement lie human faces, lived histories and resistance rooted in the soil.



# **Chapter 1**

## **Background**

If there is one country that encapsulates the battle for the future of food and agriculture, it is India. Agriculture in India is at a crossroads. Indeed, given that more than 60% of the country's 1.4-billion-plus population still make a living from agriculture (directly or indirectly), what is at stake is the future of the country. Unscrupulous interests are intent on destroying India's indigenous agri-food sector and recasting it in their own image and farmers are rising up in protest.

To appreciate what is happening to agriculture and farmers in India, we must first understand how the development paradigm has been subverted. Development used to be about breaking with colonial exploitation and radically redefining power structures. Today, neoliberal ideology masquerades as economic theory and the subsequent deregulation of international capital ensures that giant transnational conglomerates are able to ride roughshod over national sovereignty.

The deregulation of international capital flows (financial liberalisation) has effectively turned the planet into a free-for-all bonanza for the world's richest capitalists. Under the post-World-War Two Bretton Woods monetary regime, nations put restrictions on the flow of capital. Domestic firms and banks could not freely borrow from banks elsewhere or from international capital markets without seeking permission, and they could not simply take their money in and out of other countries.

Domestic financial markets were segmented from international ones elsewhere. Governments could to a large extent run their own macroeconomic policy without being restrained by monetary or fiscal policies devised by others. They could also have their own tax and industrial policies without having to seek market confidence or worry about capital flight.

However, the dismantling of Bretton Woods and the deregulation of global capital movement has led to the greater incidence of financial crises (including sovereign debt) and has deepened the level of dependency of nation states on capital markets.

The dominant narrative calls this ‘globalisation’, a euphemism for a predatory neoliberal capitalism based on endless profit growth, crises of overproduction, capital overaccumulation and market saturation and a need to constantly seek out and exploit new, untapped (foreign) markets to maintain profitability.

In India, we can see the implications very clearly. Instead of pursuing a path of democratic development, India has chosen (or been coerced) to submit to the regime of foreign finance, awaiting signals on how much it can spend, giving up any pretence of economic sovereignty and leaving the space open for private capital to move in and capture markets.

India’s agri-food sector has indeed been flung open, making it ripe for takeover. The country has borrowed more money from the World Bank than any other country in that institution’s history.

Back in the 1990s, the World Bank directed India to implement market reforms that would result in the displacement of 400 million people from the countryside. Moreover, the World Bank’s ‘Enabling the Business of Agriculture’ directives entail opening up markets to Western agribusiness and their fertilisers, pesticides, weedicides and patented seeds and compel farmers to work to supply transnational corporate global supply chains.

The aim is to let powerful corporations take control under the guise of ‘market reforms’. The very transnational corporations that receive massive taxpayer subsidies, manipulate markets, write trade agreements and institute a regime of intellectual property rights, thereby indicating that the ‘free’ market only exists in the warped delusions of those who churn out clichés about ‘price discovery’ and the sanctity of ‘the market’.

Indian agriculture is to be wholly commercialised with large-scale, mechanised (monocrop) enterprises replacing small farms that help sustain hundreds of millions of rural livelihoods while feeding the masses.

India's agrarian base is being uprooted, the very foundation of the country, its cultural traditions, communities and rural economy. Indian agriculture has witnessed [gross underinvestment](#) over the years, whereby it is now wrongly depicted as a basket case and underperforming and ripe for a sell off to those very interests who had a stake in its underinvestment.

Today, we hear much talk of 'foreign direct investment' and making India 'business friendly', but behind the benign-sounding jargon lies the hard-nosed approach of modern-day capitalism that is no less brutal for Indian farmers than early industrial capitalism was for English peasants.

Early capitalists and their cheerleaders complained how peasants were too independent and comfortable to be properly exploited. Indeed, many prominent figures advocated for their impoverishment, so they would leave their land and work for low pay in factories.

In effect, England's peasants were booted off their land by depriving a largely self-reliant population of its productive means. Although self-reliance persisted among the working class (self-education, recycling products, a culture of thrift etc.), this too was eventually eradicated via advertising and an education system that ensured conformity and dependence on the goods manufactured by capitalism.

The intention is for India's displaced cultivators to be retrained to work as cheap labour in the West's offshored plants, even though nowhere near the numbers of jobs necessary are being created and that under capitalism's 'Great Reset' human labour is to be largely replaced by artificial intelligence-driven technology. The future impacts of AI aside, the aim is for India to become a fully incorporated subsidiary of global capitalism, with its agri-food sector restructured for the needs of global supply chains and a reserve army of urban labour that will effectively serve to further weaken workers' position in relation to capital in the West.

As independent cultivators are bankrupted, the aim is that land will eventually be amalgamated to facilitate large-scale industrial cultivation. Those who remain in farming will be absorbed into corporate supply chains and squeezed as they work on contracts dictated by large agribusiness and chain retailers.

A 2016 UN report said that by 2030 Delhi's population will be 37 million.

One of the report's principal authors, [Felix Creutzig](#), said:

"The emerging mega-cities will rely increasingly on industrial-scale agricultural and supermarket chains, crowding out local food chains."

The drive is to entrench industrial agriculture and commercialise the countryside.

The outcome will be a mainly urbanised country reliant on an industrial agriculture and all it entails, including denutritified food, increasingly monolithic diets, the massive use of agrochemicals and food contaminated by hormones, steroids, antibiotics and a range of chemical additives. A country with spiralling rates of ill health, degraded soil, a collapse in the insect population, contaminated and depleted water supplies and a cartel of seed, chemical and food processing companies with ever-greater control over the global food production and supply chain.

But we do not need a crystal ball to look into the future. Much of the above is already taking place, not least the destruction of rural communities, the impoverishment of the countryside and continuing urbanisation, which is itself causing problems for India's crowded cities and eating up valuable agricultural land.

Transnational corporate-backed front groups are hard at work behind the scenes to secure this future. According to a September 2019 report in the New York Times, 'A Shadowy Industry Group Shapes Food Policy Around the World', the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) has been quietly infiltrating government health and nutrition bodies. The article lays bare ILSI's influence on the shaping of high-level food policy globally, not least in India.

ILSI helps to shape narratives and policies that sanction the roll out of processed foods containing high levels of fat, sugar and salt. In India, ILSI's expanding influence coincides with mounting rates of obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

It is worth noting that over the past 60 years in Western nations there have been fundamental changes in the quality of food. Trace elements and micronutrient contents in many basic staples have been severely depleted.

In 2007, nutritional therapist David Thomas in 'A Review of the 6th Edition of McCance and Widdowson's the Mineral Depletion of Foods Available to Us as a Nation' associated this with a precipitous change towards convenience and pre-prepared foods containing saturated fats, highly processed meats and refined carbohydrates, often devoid of vital micronutrients yet packed with a cocktail of chemical additives including colourings, flavourings and preservatives.

Aside from the impacts of Green Revolution cropping systems and practices, Thomas proposed that these changes are significant contributors to rising levels of diet-induced ill health. He added that ongoing research clearly demonstrates a significant relationship between deficiencies in micronutrients and physical and mental ill health.

Increasing prevalence of diabetes, childhood leukaemia, childhood obesity, cardiovascular disorders, infertility, osteoporosis and rheumatoid arthritis, mental illnesses and so on have all been shown to have some direct relationship to diet and specifically micronutrient deficiency.

However, this is precisely the kind of food model that ILSA supports. Little more than a front group for its 400 corporate members that provide its \$17 million budget, ILSI's members include Coca-Cola, DuPont, PepsiCo, General Mills and Danone. The report says ILSI has received more than \$2 million from chemical companies, among them Monsanto. In 2016, a UN committee issued a ruling that glyphosate, the key ingredient in Monsanto's weedkiller Roundup, was "probably not carcinogenic", contradicting an earlier report by the WHO's cancer agency. The committee was led by two ILSI officials.

From India to China, whether it has involved warning labels on unhealthy packaged food or shaping anti-obesity education campaigns that stress physical activity and divert attention from the food system itself, prominent figures with close ties to the corridors of power have been co-opted to influence policy in order to boost the interests of agri-food corporations.

Whether through IMF-World Bank structural adjustment programmes, as occurred [in Africa](#), trade agreements like NAFTA and [its impact](#) on Mexico, the co-option of policy bodies at national and international levels or [deregulated global trade](#) rules, the outcome has been similar across the world: poor and less diverse diets and illnesses, resulting from the displacement of traditional, indigenous agriculture and food production by a corporatised model centred on [unregulated global markets and transnational conglomerates](#).

## Chapter 2

### What The Green Revolution Did for India

*An amalgamation of articles written 2015–2020*

Masanobu Fukuoka, the legendary Japanese organic farmer once described Bhaskar Hiraji Save's farm as “the best in the world, even better than my own!” In 2010, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements honoured Save with the ‘One World Award for Lifetime Achievement’. Based on the results and practices on his 14-acre farm in Gujarat, Save was an inspiration for generations of farmers. By using traditional methods, he demonstrated on his farm that yield is superior to any farm using chemicals in terms of overall quantity, nutritional quality, taste, biological diversity, ecological sustainability, water conservation, energy efficiency and economic profitability.

Bhaskar Save died on 24 October 2015 at age 93. Emphasising self-reliance at the farm/village level, Save was regarded as the ‘Gandhi of natural farming’. In 2006 he published an open letter to the Indian Minister of Agriculture, the Chair of the National Commission on Farmers and other top officials to bring attention to the mounting suicide rate and debt among farmers. He wanted to encourage policy makers to abandon their policies of importing and promoting the use of toxic chemical chemicals that the ‘green revolution’ had encouraged. He regarded the green revolution as having been a total disaster for India – socially, economically and ecologically.

Below is a slightly edited version of his open letter, which reveals in some detail where India has gone wrong. At the same time, however, Bhaskar Save was optimistic that a fundamental change in policy could turn things around. His views on farming are rooted in a vision that is diametrically opposed to the current policies of selling out farmers and agriculture—the heart and soul of India—to corrupt foreign agribusiness concerns.

*To: Shri M S Swaminathan,  
The Chairperson, National Commission on Farmers,  
Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India*

*I am an 84-year-old natural/organic farmer with more than six decades of personal experience in growing a wide range of food crops. I have, over the years, practised several systems of farming, including the chemical method in the fifties—until I soon saw its pitfalls. I say with conviction that it is only by organic farming in harmony with Nature, that India can sustainably provide her people abundant, wholesome food. And meet every basic need of all—to live in health, dignity and peace.*

*You, M S Swaminathan, are considered the 'father' of India's so-called 'Green Revolution' that flung open the floodgates of toxic 'agro' chemical—ravaging the lands and lives of many millions of Indian farmers over the past 50 years. More than any other individual in our long history, it is you I hold responsible for the tragic condition of our soils and our debt-burdened farmers, driven to suicide in increasing numbers every year.*

*As destiny would have it, you are presently the chairperson of the 'National Commission on Farmers', mandated to draft a new agricultural policy. I hope this provokes some soul-searching and open debate at all levels on the extremely vital issues involved—so that we do not repeat the same kind of blunders that led us to our present, deep festering mess.*

*Farming runs in our blood. But I am sad that our (now greyed) generation of Indian farmers, allowed itself to be duped into adopting the short-sighted and ecologically devastating way of farming, imported into this country—those like you, with virtually zero farming experience!*

*For generations beyond count, this land sustained one of the highest densities of population on earth. Without any chemical 'fertilizers', pesticides, exotic dwarf strains of grain, or the new, fancy 'bio-tech' inputs that you now seem to champion. The many waves of invaders into this country, over the centuries, took away much. But the fertility of our land remained unaffected.*

*In our forests, the trees like ber (jujube), jambul (jambolan), mango, umbar (wild fig), mahua (*Madhuca indica*), imli (tamarind) yield so abundantly in their season that the branches sag under the weight of the fruit. The annual yield per tree is commonly over a tonne - year after year. But the earth*

*around remains whole and undiminished. There is no gaping hole in the ground!*

*From where do the trees - including those on rocky mountains - get their water, their NPK, etc? Though stationary, Nature provides their needs right where they stand. But 'scientists' and technocrats like you - with a blinkered, meddling itch - seem blind to this. On what basis do you prescribe what a tree or plant requires, and how much, and when.?*

*It is said: where there is lack of knowledge, ignorance masquerades as 'science'! Such is the 'science' you have espoused, leading our farmers astray - down the pits of misery. While it is no shame to be ignorant, the awareness of such ignorance is the necessary first step to knowledge. But the refusal to see it is self-deluding arrogance.*

*This country has more than 150 agricultural universities. But every year, each churns out several hundred 'educated' unemployables, trained only in misguiding farmers and spreading ecological degradation.*

*In all the six years a student spends for an M.Sc. in agriculture, the only goal is short-term - and narrowly perceived - 'productivity'. For this, the farmer is urged to do and buy a hundred things. But not a thought is spared to what a farmer must never do so that the land remains unharmed for future generations and other creatures. It is time our people and government wake up to the realisation that this industry-driven way of farming - promoted by our institutions - is inherently criminal and suicidal!*

*Trying to increase Nature's 'productivity,' is the fundamental blunder that highlights the ignorance of 'agricultural scientists' like you. When a grain of rice can reproduce a thousand-fold within months, where arises the need to increase its productivity?*

*Numerous kinds of fruit trees too yield several hundred thousand kg of nourishment each in their lifetime! That is, provided the farmer does not pour poison and mess around the tree in his greed for quick profit.*

*The mindset of servitude to 'commerce and industry,' ignoring all else, is the root of the problem. But industry merely transforms 'raw materials' sourced from Nature into commodities. It cannot create anew. Only Nature is truly*

*creative and self-regenerating - through synergy with the fresh daily inflow of the sun's energy.*

*Modern technology, wedded to commerce - rather than wisdom or compassion - has proved disastrous at all levels... We have despoiled and polluted the soil, water and air. We have wiped out most of our forests and killed its creatures. And relentlessly, modern farmers spray deadly poisons on their fields. These massacre Nature's jeev srushti - the unpretentious but tireless little workers that maintain the ventilated quality of the soil, and recycle all life-ebbed biomass into nourishment for plants. The noxious chemicals also inevitably poison the water, and Nature's prani srushti, which includes humans.*

*Can you deny that for more than forty centuries, our ancestors farmed the organic way - without any marked decline in soil fertility, as in the past four or five decades? Is it not a stark fact that the chemical-intensive and irrigation-intensive way of growing monoculture cash-crops has been primarily responsible for spreading ecological devastation far and wide in this country? Within the lifetime of a single generation!*

*This country boasted an immense diversity of crops, adapted over millennia to local conditions and needs. Our numerous tall, indigenous varieties of grain provided more biomass, shaded the soil from the sun and protected against its erosion under heavy monsoon rains. But in the guise of increasing crop production, exotic dwarf varieties were introduced and promoted through your efforts. This led to more vigorous growth of weeds, which were now able to compete successfully with the new stunted crops for sunlight. The farmer had to spend more labour and money in weeding or spraying herbicides.*

*The straw growth with the dwarf grain crops fell drastically to one-third of that with most native species! In Punjab and Haryana, even this was burned, as it was said to harbour 'pathogens'. (It was too toxic to feed farm cattle that were progressively displaced by tractors.) Consequently, much less organic matter was locally available to recycle the fertility of the soil, leading to an artificial need for externally procured inputs. Inevitably, the*

*farmers resorted to use more chemicals, and relentlessly, soil degradation and erosion set in.*

*The exotic varieties, grown with chemical 'fertiliser', were more susceptible to 'pests and diseases', leading to yet more poison (insecticides, etc.) being poured. But the attacked insect species developed resistance and reproduced prolifically. Their predators - spiders, frogs, etc. - that fed on these insects and 'biologically controlled' their population, were exterminated. So were many beneficial species like the earthworms and bees.*

*Agribusiness and technocrats recommended stronger doses, and newer, more toxic (and more expensive) chemicals. But the problems of 'pests' and 'diseases' only worsened. The spiral of ecological, financial and human costs mounted!*

*With the use of synthetic fertilizer and increased cash-cropping, irrigation needs rose enormously. In 1952, the Bhakra dam was built in Punjab, a water-rich state fed by 5 Himalayan rivers. Several thousand more big and medium dams followed all over the country, culminating in the massive Sardar Sarovar. And now, our government is toying with a grandiose, Rs 560,000 crore proposal to divert and 'inter-link' the flow of our rivers. This is sheer 'Tughlaqian' megalomania, without a thought for future generations!*

*India, next to South America, receives the highest rainfall in the world. The annual average is almost 4 feet. Where thick vegetation covers the ground, and the soil is alive and porous, at least half of this rain is soaked and stored in the soil and sub-soil strata. A good amount then percolates deeper to recharge aquifers, or 'groundwater tables'.*

*The living soil and its underlying aquifers thus serve as gigantic, ready-made reservoirs gifted free by Nature. Particularly efficient in soaking rain are the lands under forests and trees. And so, half a century ago, most parts of India had enough fresh water all round the year, long after the rains had stopped and gone. But clear the forests, and the capacity of the earth to soak the rain, drops drastically. Streams and wells run dry. It has happened in too many places already.*

*While the recharge of groundwater has greatly reduced, its extraction has been mounting. India is presently mining over 20 times more groundwater each day than it did in 1950. Much of this is mindless wastage by a minority. But most of India's people - living on hand-drawn or hand-pumped water in villages and practising only rain-fed farming - continue to use the same amount of ground water per person, as they did generations ago.*

*More than 80% of India's water consumption is for irrigation, with the largest share hogged by chemically cultivated cash crops. Maharashtra, for example, has the maximum number of big and medium dams in this country. But sugarcane alone, grown on barely 3-4% of its cultivable land, guzzles about 70% of its irrigation waters!*

*One acre of chemically grown sugarcane requires as much water as would suffice 25 acres of jowar, bajra or maize. The sugar factories too consume huge quantities. From cultivation to processing, each kilo of refined sugar needs 2 to 3 tonnes of water. This could be used to grow, by the traditional, organic way, about 150 to 200 kg of nutritious jowar or bajra (native millets).*

*While rice is suitable for rain-fed farming, its extensive multiple cropping with irrigation in winter and summer as well, is similarly hogging our water resources, and depleting aquifers. As with sugarcane, it is also irreversibly ruining the land through salinisation.*

*Soil salinisation is the greatest scourge of irrigation-intensive agriculture, as a progressively thicker crust of salts is formed on the land. Many million hectares of cropland have been ruined by it. The most serious problems are caused where water-guzzling crops like sugarcane or basmati rice are grown round the year, abandoning the traditional mixed-cropping and rotation systems of the past, which required minimal or no watering.*

*Since at least 60% of the water used for irrigation nowadays in India, is excessive, indeed harmful, the first step that needs to be taken is to control this. Thus, not only will the grave damage caused by too much irrigation stop, but a good deal of the water that is saved can also become available locally for priority areas where acute scarcity is felt.*

*Efficient, organic farming requires very little irrigation - much less than what is commonly used in modern agriculture. The yields of the crops are best when the soil is just damp. Rice is the only exception that grows even where water accumulates and is thus preferred as a monsoon crop in low-lying areas naturally prone to inundation. Excess irrigation in the case of all other crops expels the air contained in the soil's inter-particulate spaces - vitally needed for root respiration - and prolonged flooding causes root rot.*

*The irrigation on my farm is a small fraction of that provided in most modern farms today. Moreover, the porous soil under the thick vegetation of the orchard is like a sponge that soaks and percolates to the aquifer, or ground-water table, an enormous quantity of rain each monsoon. The amount of water thus stored in the ground at Kalpavruksha, is far more than the total amount withdrawn from the well for irrigation in the months when there is no rain.*

*Thus, my farm is a net supplier of water to the eco-system of the region, rather than a net consumer! Clearly, the way to ensure the water security and food security of this nation, is by organically growing mixed, locally suitable crops, plants and trees, following the laws of Nature.*

*We should restore at least 30% ground cover of mixed, indigeneous trees and forests within the next decade or two. This is the core task of ecological water harvesting - the key to restoring the natural abundance of groundwater. Outstanding benefits can be achieved within a decade at comparatively little cost. We sadly fail to realise that the potential for natural water storage in the ground is many times greater than the combined capacity of all the major and medium irrigation projects in India - complete, incomplete, or still on paper! Such decentralized underground storage is more efficient, as it is protected from the high evaporation of surface storage. The planting of trees will also make available a variety of useful produce to enhance the well-being of a larger number of people.*

*Even barren wastelands can be restored to health in less than a decade. By inter-planting short life-span, medium life-span, and long life-span crops and trees, it is possible to have planned continuity of food yield to sustain a farmer through the transition period till the long-life fruit trees mature and*

*yield. The higher availability of biomass and complete ground cover round the year will also hasten the regeneration of soil fertility.*

*After the British left, Indian agriculture was recovering steadily. There was no scarcity of diverse nourishment in the countryside, where 75% of India lived. The actual reason for pushing the 'Green Revolution' was the much narrower goal of increasing marketable surplus of a few relatively less perishable cereals to fuel the urban-industrial expansion favoured by the government.*

*The new, parasitical way of farming you vigorously promoted, benefited only the industrialists, traders and the powers-that-be. The farmers' costs rose massively and margins dipped. Combined with the eroding natural fertility of their land, they were left with little in their hands, if not mounting debts and dead soils. Many gave up farming. Many more want to do so, squeezed by the ever-rising costs. This is nothing less than tragic, since Nature has generously gifted us with all that is needed for organic farming - which also produces wholesome, rather than poisoned food!*

*Restoring the natural health of Indian agriculture is the path to solve the inter-related problems of poverty, unemployment and rising population. The maximum number of people can become self-reliant through farming only if the necessary inputs are a bare minimum. Thus, farming should require a minimum of financial capital and purchased inputs, minimum farming equipment (plough, tools, etc.), minimum necessary labour, and minimum external technology. Then, agricultural production will increase, without costs increasing. Poverty will decline, and the rise in population will be spontaneously checked.*

*Self-reliant farming, with minimal or zero external inputs, was the way we actually farmed, very successfully, in the past. Barring periods of war and excessive colonial oppression, our farmers were largely self-sufficient, and even produced surpluses, though generally smaller quantities of many more items. These, particularly perishables, were tougher to supply urban markets. And so, the nation's farmers were steered to grow chemically cultivated monocultures of a few cash-crops like wheat, rice, or sugar, rather than their traditional polycultures that needed no purchased inputs.*

## Debunking Green Revolution PR

Bhaskar Save notes that technocratic meddling has destroyed or undermined agrarian ecosystems that draw on centuries of traditional knowledge and are increasingly recognised as valid approaches to secure food security, as outlined in the paper [Food Security and Traditional Knowledge in India](#) in the Journal of South Asian Studies.

Marika Vicziany and Jagjit Plahe, the authors of that paper, note that for thousands of years Indian farmers have [experimented with](#) different plant and animal specimens acquired through migration, trading networks, gift exchanges or accidental diffusion. They note the vital importance of traditional knowledge for food security in India and the evolution of such knowledge by learning and doing, trial and error. Farmers possess acute observation, good memory for detail and transmission through teaching and storytelling.

The very farmers whose seeds and knowledge have been [appropriated by corporations](#) to be bred for proprietary chemical-dependent hybrids and now to be genetically engineered.

Large corporations with their seeds and synthetic chemical inputs have eradicated traditional systems of seed exchange. They have effectively hijacked seeds, pirated germ plasm that farmers developed over millennia and have 'rented' the seeds back to farmers. Genetic diversity among food crops has been drastically reduced. The eradication of seed diversity went much further than merely prioritising corporate seeds: the Green Revolution [deliberately side-lined traditional seeds](#) kept by farmers that were actually higher yielding and climate appropriate.

It is interesting to note that prior to the Green Revolution many of the older crops carried [dramatically higher counts of nutrients](#) per calorie. The amount of cereal each person must consume to fulfil daily dietary requirements has therefore gone up. For instance, the iron content of millet is four times that of rice. Oats carry four times more zinc than wheat. As a result, between 1961 and 2011, the protein, zinc and iron contents of the world's directly consumed cereals declined by 4%, 5% and 19%, respectively.

The high-input chemical-intensive Green Revolution model helped the drive towards greater monocropping and has resulted in [less diverse diets](#) and [less nutritious](#) foods. Its long-term impact has led to soil degradation and mineral imbalances, which in turn have adversely affected human health.

Adding weight to this argument, the authors of [the 2010 paper](#) ‘Zinc deficiencies in Agricultural Systems’ in the International Journal of Environmental and Rural Development state:

“Cropping systems promoted by the green revolution have... resulted in reduced food-crop diversity and decreased availability of micronutrients. Micronutrient malnutrition is causing increased rates of chronic diseases (cancer, heart diseases, stroke, diabetes and osteoporosis) in many developing nations; more than three billion people are directly affected by the micronutrient deficiencies. Unbalanced use of mineral fertilizers and a decrease in the use of organic manure are the main causes of the nutrient deficiency in the regions where the cropping intensity is high.”

The authors imply that the link between micronutrient deficiency in soil and human nutrition is increasingly regarded as important:

“Moreover, agricultural intensification requires an increased nutrient flow towards and greater uptake of nutrients by crops. Until now, micronutrient deficiency has mostly been addressed as a soil and, to a smaller extent, plant problem. Currently, it is being addressed as a human nutrition problem as well. Increasingly, soils and food systems are affected by micronutrients disorders, leading to reduced crop production and malnutrition and diseases in humans and plants.”

Although India, for example, might now be self-sufficient in various staples, many of these foodstuffs are high calorie-low nutrient, have led to the displacement of more nutritionally diverse cropping systems and have arguably mined the soil of nutrients. The importance of renowned agronomist [William Albrecht](#), who died in 1974, should not be overlooked here and his work on healthy soils and healthy people.

In this respect, India-based botanist Stuart Newton states that the answer to Indian agricultural productivity is not that of embracing the international, monopolistic, corporate-conglomerate promotion of chemically dependent GM crops: India has to restore and nurture its depleted, abused soils and not harm them any further, with dubious chemical overload, which is endangering human and animal health.

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research reports that soil is become deficient in nutrients and fertility. The country is losing 5,334 million tonnes of soil every year due to soil erosion because of the indiscreet and excessive use of fertilisers, insecticides and pesticides.

Aside from these deleterious impacts and the health consequences of chemical-dependent crops (see Dr Rosemary Mason's reports on the [academia.edu website](#)), [New Histories of the Green Revolution](#) (Glenn Stone, 2019) debunks the claim that the Green Revolution boosted productivity, [The Violence of the Green Revolution](#) (Vandana Shiva, 1989) details (among other things) the negative impacts on rural communities in Punjab and Bhaskar Save's [open letter](#) to Indian officials in 2006 discusses the ecological devastation.

And for good measure, in a [2019 paper](#) in the Journal of Experimental Biology and Agricultural Sciences, the authors note that native wheat varieties in India have higher nutrition content than the Green Revolution varieties. This is important to note given that Professor Glenn Stone argues that all the Green Revolution actually 'succeeded' in doing was put more wheat in the Indian diet (displacing other foodstuffs). Stone argues that food productivity per capita showed no increased or even actually decreased.

Sold on the promise that hybrid seeds and associated chemical inputs would enhance food security on the basis of higher productivity, the Green Revolution transformed agriculture in many regions. But in places like Punjab, Shiva notes that to gain access to seeds and chemicals farmers had to take out loans and debt became (and remains) a constant worry. Many became impoverished and social relations within rural communities were radically altered: previously, farmers would save and exchange seeds

but now they became dependent on unscrupulous money lenders, banks and seed manufacturers and suppliers. In her book, Shiva describes the social marginalisation and violence that resulted from the Green Revolution and its impacts.

And today, under the guise of 'climate emergency', we are now seeing a push for the Global South to embrace the Gates' vision for a one-world agriculture ('Ag One') dominated by global agribusiness and the tech giants.

## Chapter 3

# Farmers' Struggle in India: The Farm Laws and a Neoliberal Death Knell

*An amalgamation of articles written between 2016–2022*

In 1830, British colonial administrator Lord Metcalfe said India's villages were little republics that had nearly everything they could want for within themselves. India's ability to endure derived from these communities:

“Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down but the village community remains the same. It is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence.”

Metcalfe was acutely aware that to subjugate India this capacity to ‘endure’ had to be broken. Since gaining independence from the British, India's rulers have only further served to undermine the vibrancy of rural India. But now a potential death knell for rural India and its villages is underway.

There is a plan for the future of India, and most of its current farmers do not have a role in it.

Three important farm bills are aimed at imposing the shock therapy of neoliberalism on India's agri-food sector for the benefit of large commodity traders and other (international) corporations: many if not most smallholder farmers could go to the wall in a landscape of ‘get big or get out’.

This legislation comprises the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020.

This could represent a final death knell for indigenous agriculture in India. The legislation will mean that mandis—state-run market locations for farmers to sell their agricultural produce via auction to traders—can be bypassed, allowing farmers to sell to private players elsewhere (physically and online), thereby undermining the regulatory role of the public sector. In

trade areas open to the private sector, no fees will be levied (fees levied in mandis go to the states and, in principle, are used to enhance infrastructure to help farmers).

This could incentivise the corporate sector operating outside of the mandis to (initially at least) offer better prices to farmers; however, as the mandi system is run down completely, these corporations will monopolise trade, capture the sector and dictate prices to farmers.

Another outcome could see the largely unregulated storage of produce and speculation, opening the farming sector to a free-for-all profiteering payday for the big traders and jeopardising food security. The government will no longer regulate and make key produce available to consumers at fair prices. This policy ground is being ceded to influential market players.

The legislation will enable [transnational agri-food corporations](#) like Cargill and Walmart and India's billionaire capitalists Gautam Adani (agribusiness conglomerate) and Mukesh Ambani (Reliance retail chain) to decide on what is to be cultivated at what price, how much of it is to be cultivated within India and how it is to be produced and processed. Industrial agriculture will be the norm with all the [devastating health, social and environmental costs](#) that the model brings with it.

### **Forged in Washington**

The recent agriculture legislation represents the final pieces of a 30-year-old plan which will benefit a handful of billionaires in the US and in India. It means the livelihoods of hundreds of millions (the majority of the population) who still rely on agriculture for a living are to be sacrificed at the behest of these elite interests.

Consider that much of the UK's wealth came from sucking \$45 trillion from India alone, according to [renowned economist Utsa Patnaik](#). Britain grew rich by underdeveloping India. Today, what are little more than modern-day East India-type corporations are currently in the process of helping themselves to the country's most valuable asset—agriculture.

According to the World Bank's lending report, based on data compiled up to 2015, India was easily the largest recipient of its loans in the history of

the institution. On the back of India's foreign exchange crisis in the 1990s, the IMF and World Bank wanted India to shift hundreds of millions out of agriculture.

In return for up to more than \$120 billion in loans at the time, India was directed to dismantle its state-owned seed supply system, reduce subsidies, run down public agriculture institutions and offer incentives for the growing of cash crops to earn foreign exchange.

The details of this plan appear in a January 2021 article by the Mumbai-based Research Unit for Political Economy (RUPE), '[Modi's Farm Produce Act Was Authored Thirty Years Ago, in Washington DC](#)'. The piece says that the current agricultural 'reforms' are part of a broader process of imperialism's increasing capture of the Indian economy:

"Indian business giants such as Reliance and Adani are major recipients of foreign investment, as we have seen in sectors such as telecom, retail and energy. At the same time, multinational corporations and other financial investors in the sectors of agriculture, logistics and retail are also setting up their own operations in India. Multinational trading corporations dominate global trade in agricultural commodities... The opening of India's agriculture and food economy to foreign investors and global agribusinesses is a longstanding project of the imperialist countries."

The article provides details of a 1991 World Bank memorandum that set out the programme for India.

It states that, at the time, India was still in its foreign exchange crisis of 1990-91 and had just submitted itself to an IMF-monitored 'structural adjustment' programme. India's July 1991 budget marked the fateful start of India's neoliberal era.

The Modi government is attempting to dramatically accelerate the implementation of the above programme, which to date has been too slow for the overlords in Washington: the dismantling of the public procurement and distribution of food is to be facilitated courtesy of the three agriculture-related acts passed by parliament.

What is happening predates the current administration, but it is as if Modi was especially groomed to push through the final components of this agenda.

Describing itself as a major global communications, stakeholder engagement and business strategy company, [APCO Worldwide](#) is a lobby agency with [firm links](#) to the Wall Street/corporate US establishment and facilitates its global agenda. Some years ago, Modi turned to APCO to help transform his image and turn him into electable pro-corporate PM material. It also helped him get the message out that what he achieved in Gujarat as chief minister was a miracle of economic neoliberalism, although the actual [reality](#) is quite different.

Some years ago, following the 2008 financial crisis, APCO stated that India's resilience in weathering the global downturn has made governments, policy makers, economists, corporate houses and fund managers believe that the country can play a significant role in the recovery of global capitalism.

Decoded, this means global capital moving into regions and nations and displacing indigenous players. Where agriculture is concerned, this hides behind emotive and seemingly altruistic rhetoric about 'helping farmers' and the need to 'feed a burgeoning population' (regardless of the fact this is exactly what India's farmers have been doing).

Modi has been on board with this aim and has proudly stated that India is now one of the most 'business friendly' countries in the world. What he really means is that India is in compliance with World Bank directives on 'ease of doing business' and '[enabling the business of agriculture](#)' by facilitating further privatisation of public enterprises, [environment-destroying policies](#) and forcing working people to take part in a [race to the bottom](#) based on '[free' market fundamentalism](#).

APCO has described India as a trillion-dollar market. It talks about positioning international funds and facilitating corporations' ability to exploit markets, sell products and secure profit. None of this is a recipe for national sovereignty, let alone food security.

Renowned agronomist MS Swaminathan [has stated](#):

“Independent foreign policy is only possible with food security. Therefore, food has more than just eating implications. It protects national sovereignty, national rights and national prestige.”

The drive is to drastically dilute the role of the public sector in agriculture, reducing it to a facilitator of private capital. The norm will be industrial (genetically modified—GM) commodity-crop farming suited to the needs of the likes of Cargill, Archer Daniels Midlands, Louis Dreyfus, Bunge and India’s retail and agribusiness giants as well as the global agritech, seed and agrochemical corporations and Silicon Valley, which is leading the drive for ‘data-driven agriculture’.

Of course, those fund managers and corporate houses mentioned by APCO are no doubt also well positioned to take advantage, not least via the purchase of land and land speculation. For example, the Karnataka Land Reform Act will make it easier for business to purchase agricultural land, resulting in increased landlessness and urban migration.

As a result of the ongoing programme, more than 300,000 farmers in India have taken their lives since 1997 and many more are experiencing economic distress or have left farming as a result of debt, a shift to cash crops and economic liberalisation. There has been an ongoing strategy to make farming non-viable for many of India’s farmers.

The number of cultivators in India declined from 166 million to 146 million between 2004 and 2011. Some 6,700 left farming each day. Between 2015 and 2022, the number of cultivators is likely to decrease to around 127 million.

We have seen the running down of the sector for decades, spiralling input costs, withdrawal of government assistance and the impacts of cheap, subsidised imports which depress farmers’ incomes. India’s spurt of high GDP growth during the last decade was partly fuelled on the back of cheap food and the subsequent impoverishment of farmers: the gap between farmers’ income and the rest of the population has widened markedly.

While underperforming corporations receive [massive handouts and have loans written off](#), the lack of a secure income, exposure to international market prices and cheap imports contribute to farmers' misery of not being able to cover the costs of production.

With more than 800 million people, rural India is arguably the most interesting and complex place on the planet but is plagued by farmer suicides, child malnourishment, growing unemployment, increased informalisation, indebtedness and an overall collapse of agriculture.

Given that India is still an agrarian-based society, renowned journalist P Sainath says what is taking place can be described as a crisis of civilisation proportions and can be explained in just five words: hijack of agriculture by corporations. He notes the process by which it is being done in five words too: predatory commercialisation of the countryside. And another five words to describe the outcome: biggest displacement in our history.

Take the cultivation of pulses, for instance, which highlights the plight of farmers. According to a report in the Indian Express (September 2017), pulses production increased by 40% during the previous 12 months (a year of record production). At the same time, however, imports also rose resulting in black gram selling at 4,000 rupees per quintal (much less than during the previous 12 months). This effectively pushed down prices thereby reducing farmers already meagre incomes.

We have already witnessed a running down of the indigenous edible oils sector thanks to Indonesian palm oil imports (which benefits Cargill) on the back of World Bank pressure to reduce tariffs (India was virtually self-sufficient in edible oils in the 1990s but now faces increasing import costs).

The pressure from the richer nations for the Indian government to further reduce support given to farmers and open up to imports and export-oriented 'free market' trade is based on nothing but hypocrisy.

On the 'Down to Earth' website in late 2017, it was stated some 3.2 million people were engaged in agriculture in the US in 2015. The US government provided them each with a subsidy of \$7,860 on average. Japan provides a subsidy of \$14,136 and New Zealand \$2,623 to its farmers.

The Indian government provides on average a subsidy of \$873 to farmers. However, between 2012 and 2014, India reduced the subsidy on agriculture and food security by \$3 billion.

According to policy analyst Devinder Sharma, subsidies provided to US wheat and rice farmers are more than the market worth of these two crops. He also notes that, per day, each cow in Europe receives subsidy worth more than an Indian farmer's daily income.

The Indian farmer simply cannot compete with this. The World Bank, WTO and the IMF have effectively served to undermine the indigenous farm sector in India.

And now, based on the new farm laws (enacted in September 2020), by reducing public sector buffer stocks and facilitating corporate-dictated contract farming and full-scale neoliberal marketisation for the sale and procurement of produce, India will be sacrificing its farmers and its own food security for the benefit of a handful of billionaires.

Many millions have already been displaced from the Indian countryside and have had to seek work in the cities. And if the coronavirus-related lockdown has indicated anything, it is that many of these migrant workers had failed to gain a secure foothold in urban centres and were compelled to return 'home' to their villages. Their lives are defined by low pay and insecurity even after 30 years of neoliberal 'reforms'.

### **Charter for change**

In late November 2018, a charter was released by the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (an umbrella group of around 250 farmers' organisations) to coincide with the massive well-publicised farmers' march that was then taking place in Delhi.

The charter stated:

"Farmers are not just a residue from our past; farmers, agriculture and village India are integral to the future of India and the world; as bearers of historic knowledge, skills and culture; as agents of food safety, security and sovereignty; and as guardians of biodiversity and ecological sustainability."

The farmers stated that they were alarmed at the economic, ecological, social and existential crisis of Indian agriculture as well as the persistent state neglect of the sector and discrimination against farming communities.

They were also concerned about the deepening penetration of large, predatory and profit hungry corporations, farmers' suicide across the country and the unbearable burden of indebtedness and the widening disparities between farmers and other sectors.

The charter called on the Indian parliament to immediately hold a special session to pass and enact two bills that were of, by and for the farmers of India.

If passed by parliament, among other things, the Farmers' Freedom from Indebtedness Bill 2018 would have provided for the complete loan waiver for all farmers and agricultural workers.

The second bill, The Farmers' Right to Guaranteed Remunerative Minimum Support Prices for Agricultural Commodities Bill 2018, would have seen the government take measures to bring down the input cost of farming through specific regulation of the prices of seeds, agriculture machinery and equipment, diesel, fertilisers and insecticides, while making purchase of farm produce below the minimum support price (MSP) both illegal and punishable.

The charter also called for a special discussion on the universalisation of the public distribution system, the withdrawal of pesticides that have been banned elsewhere and the non-approval of genetically engineered seeds without a comprehensive need and impact assessment.

Other demands included no foreign direct investment in agriculture and food processing, the protection of farmers from corporate plunder in the name of contract farming, investment in farmers' collectives to create farmer producer organisations and peasant cooperatives and the promotion of agroecology based on suitable cropping patterns and local seed diversity revival.

Now, in 2021, rather than responding to these requirements, we see the Indian government's promotion and facilitation of—by way of recent legislation—the corporatisation of agriculture and the dismantling of the public distribution system (and the MSP) as well as the laying of groundwork for contract farming.

Although the two aforementioned bills from 2018 have now lapsed, farmers are demanding that the new pro-corporate (anti-farmer) farm laws are replaced with a legal framework that guarantees the MSP to farmers.

Indeed, the [RUPE notes](#) that MSPs via government procurement of essential crops and commodities should be extended to the likes of maize, cotton, oilseed and pulses. At the moment, only farmers in certain states who produce rice and wheat are the main beneficiaries of government procurement at MSP.

Since per capita protein consumption in India is abysmally low and has fallen further during the liberalisation era, the provision of pulses in the public distribution system (PDS) is long overdue and desperately needed. The RUPE argues that the 'excess' stocks of food grain with the Food Corporation of India are merely the result of the failure or refusal of the government to distribute grain to the people.

(For those not familiar with the PDS: central government via the Food Corporation of India (FCI) is responsible for buying food grains from farmers at MSP at state-run market yards or mandis. It then allocates the grains to each state. State governments then deliver to the ration shops.)

If public procurement of a wider range of crops at the MSP were to occur—and MSPs were guaranteed for rice and wheat across all states—it would help address hunger and malnutrition as well as farmer distress.

Instead of rolling back the role of the public sector and surrendering the system to foreign corporations, there is a need to further expand official procurement and public distribution. This would occur by extending procurement to additional states and expanding the range of commodities under the PDS.

Of course, some will raise a red flag here and say this would cost too much. But as the RUPE notes, it would cost around 20% of the current handouts ('incentives') received by corporations and their super-rich owners, which do not benefit the bulk of the wider population in any way. It is also worth considering that the loans provided to just [five large corporations](#) in India were in 2016 equal to the entire farm debt.

But this is not where the government's priorities lie.

It is clear that the existence of the MSP, the Food Corporation of India, the public distribution system and publicly held buffer stocks constitute an obstacle to the profit-driven requirements of global agribusiness interests who have sat with government agencies and set out their wish-lists.

The RUPE notes that India accounts for 15% of world consumption of cereals. India's buffer stocks are equivalent to 15-25% of global stocks and 40% of world trade in rice and wheat. Any large reduction in these stocks will almost certainly affect world prices: farmers would be hit by depressed prices; later, once India became dependent on imports, prices could rise on the international market and Indian consumers would be hit.

At the same time, the richer countries are applying enormous pressure on India to scrap its meagre agricultural subsidies; yet their own subsidies are vast multiples of India's. The end result could be India becoming dependent on imports and the restructure of its own agriculture to crops destined for export.

Vast buffer stocks would of course still exist; but instead of India holding these stocks, they would be held by multinational trading firms and India would bid for them with borrowed funds. In other words, instead of holding physical buffer stocks, India would hold foreign exchange reserves.

Successive administrations have made the country dependent on volatile flows of foreign capital and India's foreign exchange reserves have been built up by borrowing and foreign investments. The fear of capital flight is ever present. Policies are often governed by the drive to attract and retain these inflows and maintain market confidence by ceding to the demands of international capital.

This throttling of democracy and the ‘financialisation’ of agriculture would seriously undermine the nation’s food security and leave almost 1.4 billion people at the mercy of international speculators and markets and foreign investment.

If unrepealed, the recent legislation represents the ultimate betrayal of India’s farmers and democracy as well as the final surrender of food security and food sovereignty to unaccountable corporations. This legislation could eventually lead to the country relying on outside forces to feed its population—and a possible return to hand-to-mouth imports, especially in an increasingly volatile world prone to conflict, public health scares, unregulated land and commodity speculation and price shocks.

## Chapter 4

# Colonial Deindustrialisation: Predation and Inequality

*An amalgamation of articles written between 2016–2022*

According to a report by Oxfam, '[The Inequality Virus](#)', the wealth of the world's billionaires increased by \$3.9tn (trillion) between 18 March and 31 December 2020. Their total wealth now stands at \$11.95tn. The world's 10 richest billionaires have collectively seen their wealth increase by \$540bn over this period. In September 2020, Jeff Bezos could have paid all 876,000 Amazon employees a \$105,000 bonus and still be as wealthy as he was before COVID.

At the same time, hundreds of millions of people will lose (have lost) their jobs and face destitution and hunger. It is estimated that the total number of people living in poverty around the world could have increased by between 200 million and 500 million in 2020. The number of people living in poverty might not return even to its pre-crisis level for over a decade.

Mukesh Ambani, India's richest man and head of Reliance Industries, which specialises in petrol, retail and telecommunications, doubled his wealth between March and October 2020. He now has \$78.3bn. The average increase in Ambani's wealth in just over four days represented more than the combined annual wages of all of Reliance Industries' 195,000 employees.

The Oxfam report states that lockdown in India resulted in the country's billionaires increasing their wealth by around 35%. At the same time, 84% of households suffered varying degrees of income loss. Some 170,000 people lost their jobs every hour in April 2020 alone.

The authors also noted that income increases for India's top 100 billionaires since March 2020 was enough to give each of the 138 million poorest people a cheque for 94,045 rupees.

The report went on to state:

“... it would take an unskilled worker 10,000 years to make what Ambani made in an hour during the pandemic... and three years to make what Ambani made in a second.”

During lockdown and after, hundreds of thousands of migrant workers in the cities (who had no option but to escape the city to avoid the manufactured, deepening agrarian crisis) were left without jobs, money, food or shelter.

It is clear that COVID has been used as cover for consolidating the power of the unimaginably rich. But plans for boosting their power and wealth will not stop there.

### **Tech giants**

An article on the [grain.org](https://grain.org) website, ‘[Digital control: how big tech moves into food and farming \(and what it means\)](#)’, describes how Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Facebook and others are closing in on the global agri-food sector while the likes of Bayer, Syngenta, Corteva and Cargill are cementing their stranglehold.

The tech giants’ entry into the sector will increasingly lead to a mutually beneficial integration between the companies that supply products to farmers (pesticides, seeds, fertilisers, tractors, etc) and those that control the flow of data and have access to digital (cloud) infrastructure and food consumers. This system is based on corporate concentration (monopolisation).

In India, global corporations are also colonising the retail space through e-commerce. Walmart entered into India in 2016 by a US\$3.3 billion take-over of the online retail start-up Jet.com which, in 2018, was followed by a US\$16 billion take-over of India’s largest online retail platform Flipkart. Today, Walmart and Amazon now control almost two thirds of India’s digital retail sector.

Amazon and Walmart are using predatory pricing, deep discounts and other unfair business practices to lure customers towards their online platforms. According to GRAIN, when the two companies generated sales of over US\$3 billion in just six days during a Diwali festival sales blitz,

India's small retailers called out in desperation for a boycott of online shopping.

In 2020, Facebook and the US-based private equity concern KKR committed over US\$7 billion to Reliance Jio, the digital store of one of India's biggest retail chains. Customers will soon be able to shop at Reliance Jio through Facebook's chat application, WhatsApp.

The plan for retail is clear: the eradication of millions of small traders and retailers and neighbourhood mom and pop shops. It is similar in agriculture.

The aim is to buy up rural land, amalgamate it and rollout a system of chemically drenched farmerless farms owned or controlled by financial speculators, the high-tech giants and traditional agribusiness concerns. The end game is a system of contract farming that serves the interests of big tech, big agribusiness and big retail. Smallholder peasant agriculture is regarded as an impediment.

This model will be based on driverless tractors, drones, genetically engineered/lab-produced food and all data pertaining to land, water, weather, seeds and soils patented and often pirated from peasant farmers.

Farmers possess centuries of accumulated knowledge that once gone will never be got back. Corporatisation of the sector has already destroyed or undermined functioning agrarian ecosystems that draw on centuries of traditional knowledge and are increasingly recognised as valid approaches to secure food security.

And what of the hundreds of millions to be displaced in order to fill the pockets of the billionaire owners of these corporations? Driven to cities to face a future of joblessness: mere 'collateral damage' resulting from a short-sighted system of dispossessive predatory capitalism that destroys the link between humans, ecology and nature to boost the bottom line of the immensely rich.

India's agri-food sector has been on the radar of global corporations for decades. With deep market penetration and near saturation having been achieved by agribusiness in the US and elsewhere, India represents an

opportunity for expansion and maintaining business viability and all-important profit growth. And by teaming up with the high-tech players in Silicon Valley, multi-billion-dollar data management markets are being created. From data and knowledge to land, weather and seeds, capitalism is compelled to eventually commodify (patent and own) all aspects of life and nature.

As independent cultivators are bankrupted, the aim is that land will eventually be amalgamated to facilitate large-scale industrial cultivation. Indeed, a piece on the RUPE site, '[The Kisans Are Right: Their Land Is At Stake](#)', describes how the Indian government is ascertaining which land is owned by whom with the ultimate aim of making it easier to eventually sell it off (to foreign investors and agribusiness).

The recent farm bills (subsequently repealed in December 2021) will impose the neoliberal shock therapy of dispossession and dependency, finally clearing the way to restructure the agri-food sector. The massive inequalities and injustices that have resulted from the COVID-related lockdowns could be a mere taste of what is to come.

In June 2018, the Joint Action Committee against Foreign Retail and E-commerce (JACAFRE) [issued a statement](#) on Walmart's acquisition of Flipkart. It argued that it undermines India's economic and digital sovereignty and the livelihood of millions.

The deal would lead to Walmart and Amazon dominating India's e-retail sector. These two US companies would also own India's key consumer and other economic data, making them the country's digital overlords, joining the ranks of Google and Facebook.

JACAFRE was formed to resist the entry of foreign corporations like Walmart and Amazon into India's e-commerce market. Its members represent more than 100 national groups, including major trade, workers and farmers' organisations.

On 8 January 2021, JACAFRE published an [open letter](#) saying that the three new farm laws, passed by parliament in September 2020, centre on enabling and facilitating the unregulated corporatisation of agriculture

value chains. This will effectively make farmers and small traders of agricultural produce become subservient to the interests of a few agri-food and e-commerce giants or will eradicate them completely.

The government is facilitating the dominance of giant corporations, not least through digital or e-commerce platforms, to control the entire value chain. The letter states that if the new farm laws are closely examined, it will be evident that unregulated digitalisation is an important aspect of them.

And this is not lost on Parminder Jeet Singh from IT for Change (a member of JACAFRE). Referring to Walmart's takeover of online retailer Flipkart, [Singh notes](#) that there was strong resistance to Walmart entering India with its physical stores; however, online and offline worlds are now merged.

That is because, today, e-commerce companies not only control data about consumption but also control data on production, logistics, who needs what, when they need it, who should produce it, who should move it and when it should be moved.

Through the control of data (knowledge), e-commerce platforms can shape the entire physical economy. What is concerning is that Amazon and Walmart have sufficient global clout to ensure they become a duopoly, more or less controlling much of India's economy.

Singh says that whereas you can regulate an Indian company, this cannot be done with foreign players who have global data, global power and will be near-impossible to regulate.

While China succeeded in digital industrialisation by building up its own firms, Singh observes that the EU is now a digital colony of the US. The danger is clear for India.

India has its own skills and digital forms, so why is the government letting in US companies to dominate and buy India's digital platforms?

And 'platform' is a key word here. We are seeing the eradication of the marketplace. Platforms will control everything from production to logistics to even primary activities like agriculture and farming. Data gives power to

platforms to dictate what needs to be manufactured and in what quantities.

The digital platform is the brain of the whole system. The farmer will be told how much production is expected, how much rain is anticipated, what type of soil quality there is, what type of (GM) seeds and are inputs are required and when the produce needs to be ready.

Those traders, manufacturers and primary producers who survive will become slaves to platforms and lose their independence. Moreover, e-commerce platforms will become permanently embedded once artificial intelligence begins to plan and determine all of the above.

Of course, things have been moving in this direction for a long time, especially since India began capitulating to the tenets of neoliberalism in the early 1990s and all that entails, not least an increasing dependence on borrowing and foreign capital inflows and subservience to destructive World Bank-IMF economic directives.

### **Knock-out blow**

But what we are currently witnessing with the three farm bills and the growing role of (foreign) e-commerce will bring about the ultimate knock-out blow to the peasantry and many small independent enterprises. This has been the objective of powerful players who have regarded India as the potential jewel in the crown of their corporate empires for a long time.

The process resembles the structural adjustment programmes that were imposed on African countries some decades ago. Economics Professor Michel Chossudovsky notes in his 1997 book 'The Globalization of Poverty' that economies are:

“opened up through the concurrent displacement of a pre-existing productive system. Small and medium-sized enterprises are pushed into bankruptcy or obliged to produce for a global distributor, state enterprises are privatised or closed down, independent agricultural producers are impoverished.” (p.16)

The game plan is clear and JACAFRE says the government should urgently consult all stakeholders—traders, farmers and other small and medium

size players—towards a holistic new economic model where all economic actors are assured their due and appropriately valued role. Small and medium size economic actors cannot be allowed to be reduced to being helpless agents of a few digitally enabled mega-corporations.

JACAFRE concludes:

“We appeal to the government that it should urgently address the issues raised by those farmers asking for the three laws to be repealed.

Specifically, from a traders’ point of view, the role of small and medium traders all along the agri-produce value chain has to be strengthened and protected against its unmitigated corporatisation.”

It is clear that the ongoing farmers’ protest in India is not just about farming. It represents a struggle for the heart and soul of the country.

Farmers, farmers’ unions and their representatives demand that the laws be repealed and state that they will not accept a compromise. Farmers’ leaders welcomed the Supreme Court of India stay order on the implementation of the farm laws in January 2021.

However, based on more than 10 rounds of talks between farmers representatives and the government, it seemed at one stage that the ruling administration would never back down on implementing the laws.

In November 2020, a nationwide general strike took place in support of the farmers and in that month around 300,000 farmers marched from the states of Punjab and Haryana to Delhi for what leaders called a “decisive battle” with the central government.

But as the farmers reached the capital, most were stopped by barricades, dug up roads, water cannons, baton charges and barbed wire erected by police. The farmers set up camps along five major roads, building makeshift tents with a view to staying for months if their demands were not met.

Throughout 2021, thousands of farmers remained camped at various points on the border, enduring the cold, the rain and the searing heat. In late March 2021, it was estimated that there were around 40,000 protestors camped at Singhu and Tikri at the Delhi border.

On 26 January 2021, India's Republic Day, tens of thousands of farmers held a farmer's parade with a large convoy of tractors and drove into Delhi.

In September 2021, tens of thousands of farmers attended a rally in the city of Muzaffarnagar in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP). Hundreds of thousands more turned out for other rallies in the state.

These huge gatherings came ahead of important polls in 2022 in UP, India's most populous state with 200 million people and governed by Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In the 2017 assembly polls, the BJP won 325 out of a total of 403 seats.

Speaking at the rally in Muzaffarnagar, farmers' leader Rakesh Tikait stated:

"We take a pledge that we'll not leave the protest site there (around Delhi) even if our graveyard is made there. We will lay down our lives if needed but will not leave the protest site until we emerge victorious."

Tikait also attacked the Modi-led government for:

"... selling the country to corporates... We have to stop the country from getting sold. Farmers should be saved; the country should be saved."

Police brutality, the smearing of protesters by certain prominent media commentators and politicians, the illegal detention of protesters and clampdowns on free speech (journalists arrested, social media accounts closed, shutting down internet services) have been symptomatic of officialdom's approach to the farmers' struggle which itself has been defined by resilience, resoluteness and restraint.

But it is not as though the farmers' struggle arose overnight. Indian agriculture has been deliberately starved of government support for decades and has resulted in a well-documented agrarian—even civilisation—crisis. What we are currently seeing is the result of injustices and neglect coming to a head as foreign agri-capital tries to impose its neoliberal 'final solution' on Indian agriculture.

It is essential to protect and strengthen local markets and indigenous independent small-scale enterprises, whether farmers, hawkers, food processors or mom and pop corner stores. This will ensure that India has

more control over its food supply, the ability to determine its own policies and economic independence: in other words, the protection of food and national sovereignty and a greater ability to pursue genuine democratic development.

Washington and its ideologue economists call this ‘liberalising’ the economy: how is an inability to determine your own economic policies and surrendering food security to outside forces in any way liberating?

It is interesting to note that the BBC [reported](#) that, in its annual report on global political rights and liberties, the US-based non-profit Freedom House has downgraded India from a free democracy to a “partially free democracy”. It also reported that Sweden-based V-Dem Institute says India is now an “electoral autocracy”. India did not fare any better in a report by The Economist Intelligent Unit’s Democracy Index.

The BBC’s neglect of Britain’s own slide towards COVID-related authoritarianism aside, the report on India was not without substance. It focused on the increase in anti-Muslim feeling, diminishing of freedom of expression, the role of the media and the restrictions on civil society since PM Narendra Modi took power.

The undermining of liberties in all these areas is cause for concern in its own right. But this trend towards divisiveness and authoritarianism serves another purpose: it helps smooth the path for the corporate takeover of the country.

Whether it involves a ‘divide and rule’ strategy along religious lines to divert attention, the suppression of free speech or pushing unpopular farm bills through parliament without proper debate while using the police and the media to undermine the farmers’ protest, a major undemocratic heist is under way that will fundamentally adversely impact people’s livelihoods and the cultural and social fabric of India.

On one side, there are the interests of a handful of multi-billionaires who own the corporations and platforms that seek to control India. On the other, there are the interests of hundreds of millions of cultivators, vendors and various small-scale enterprises who are regarded by these rich

individuals as mere collateral damage to be displaced in their quest for ever greater profit.

Indian farmers are currently on the frontline against global capitalism and the colonial-style deindustrialisation of the economy. This is where ultimately the struggle for democracy and the future of India is taking place.

In April 2021, the Indian government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Microsoft, allowing its local partner CropData to leverage a master database of farmers. The MoU seems to be part of the [AgriStack](#) policy initiative, which involves the roll out of ‘disruptive’ technologies and digital databases in the agricultural sector.

Based on press reports and government statements, Microsoft would help farmers with post-harvest management solutions by building a collaborative platform and capturing agriculture datasets such as crop yields, weather data, market demand and prices. In turn, this would create a farmer interface for ‘smart’ agriculture, including post-harvest management and distribution.

CropData will be granted access to a government database of 50 million farmers and their land records. As the database is developed, it will include farmers’ personal details, profile of land held (cadastral maps, farm size, land titles, local climatic and geographical conditions), production details (crops grown, production history, input history, quality of output, machinery in possession) and financial details (input costs, average return, credit history).

The stated aim is to use digital technology to improve financing, inputs, cultivation and supply and distribution.

It seems that the blueprint for AgriStack is in an advanced stage despite the lack of consultation with or involvement of farmers themselves. Technology could certainly improve the sector but handing control over to powerful private concerns will merely facilitate what they require in terms of market capture and farmer dependency.

Such ‘data-driven agriculture’ is integral to the recent farm legislation which includes a proposal to create a digital profile of cultivators, their

farm holdings, climatic conditions in an area, what is grown and average output.

Many concerns have been raised about this, ranging from farmer displacement, the further exploitation of farmers through microfinance and the misuse of farmer's data and increased algorithmic decision-making without accountability.

### **Familiar playbook**

The displacement of farmers is not lost on the RUPE which, in a [three-part series of articles](#), explains how neoliberal capitalism has removed peasant farmers from their land to facilitate an active land market for corporate interests. The Indian government is trying to establish a system of 'conclusive titling' of all land in the country, so that ownership can be identified and land can then be bought or taken away.

Taking Mexico as an example, the RUPE says:

"Unlike Mexico, India never underwent significant land reform. Nevertheless, its current programme of 'conclusive titling' of land bears clear resemblances to Mexico's post-1992 drive to hand over property rights... The Indian rulers are closely following the script followed by Mexico, written in Washington."

The plan is that, as farmers lose access to land or can be identified as legal owners, predatory institutional investors and large agribusinesses will buy up and amalgamate holdings, facilitating the further roll out of high-input, corporate-dependent industrial agriculture.

This is an example of stakeholder-partnership capitalism, much promoted by the likes of the World Economic Forum, whereby a government facilitates the gathering of such information by a private player which can then, in this case, use the data for developing a land market (courtesy of land law changes that the government enacts) for institutional investors at the expense of smallholder farmers who will find themselves displaced.

By harvesting (pirating) information—under the benign-sounding policy of data-driven agriculture—private corporations will be better placed to

exploit farmers' situations for their own ends: they will know more about their incomes and businesses than individual farmers themselves.

Some [55 civil society groups and organisations have written](#) to the government expressing these and various other concerns, not least the perceived policy vacuum with respect to the data privacy of farmers and the exclusion of farmers themselves in current policy initiatives.

In an open letter, they state:

“At a time when ‘[data has become the new oil](#)’ and the [industry is looking at it as the next source of profits](#), there is a need to ensure the interest of farmers. It will not be surprising that corporations will approach this as one more profit-making possibility, as a market for so-called ‘solutions’ which lead to sale of unsustainable agri-inputs combined with greater loans and indebtedness of farmers for this through fintech, as well as [the increased threat of dispossession by private corporations](#).”

They add that any proposal which seeks to tackle the issues that plague Indian agriculture must address the fundamental causes of these issues. The [current model relies on ‘tech-solutionism’](#), which emphasises using technology to solve structural issues.

There is also the issue of reduced transparency on the part of the government through algorithm-based decision-making.

The 55 signatories request the government holds consultations with all stakeholders, especially farmers' organisations, on the direction of its digital push as well as the basis of partnerships and put out a policy document in this regard after giving due consideration to feedback from farmers and farmer organisations. As agriculture is a state subject, the central government should consult the state governments also.

They state that all initiatives that the government has begun with private entities to integrate and/or share multiple databases with private/personal information about individual farmers or their farms be put on hold till an inclusive policy framework is put in place and a data protection law is passed.

It is also advocated that the development of AgriStack, both as a policy framework and its execution, should take the concerns and experiences of farmers as the prime starting point.

The letter states that if the new farm laws are closely examined, it will be evident that unregulated digitalisation is an important aspect of them.

There is the strong possibility that monopolistic corporate owned e-commerce platforms will eventually control much of India's economy given the current policy trajectory. From retail and logistics to cultivation, data certainly will be the 'new oil', giving power to platforms to dictate what needs to be manufactured and in what quantities.

Handing over all information about the sector to Microsoft and others places power in their hands—the power to shape the sector in their own image.

Bayer, Corteva, Syngenta and traditional agribusiness will work with Microsoft, Google and the big-tech giants to facilitate AI-driven farmerless farms and e-commerce retail dominated by the likes of Amazon and Walmart. A cartel of data owners, proprietary input suppliers and retail concerns at the commanding heights of the economy, peddling toxic industrial food and the devastating health impacts associated with it.

And elected representatives? Their role will be highly limited to technocratic overseers of these platforms and the artificial intelligence tools that plan and determine all of the above.

The links between humans and the land reduced to an AI-driven technocratic dystopia in compliance with the tenets of neoliberal capitalism. AgriStack will help facilitate this end game.

## Chapter 5

# Neoliberal Playbook: Economic Terrorism and Smashing Farmers' Heads

*An amalgamation of articles written between 2016–2022*

While the brands lining the shelves of giant retail outlets seem vast, a handful of food companies own these brands which, in turn, rely on a relatively narrow range of produce for ingredients. At the same time, this illusion of choice often comes at the expense of food security in poorer countries that were compelled to restructure their agriculture to facilitate agri-exports courtesy of the World Bank, IMF, the WTO and global agribusiness interests.

In Mexico, transnational food retail and processing companies have taken over food distribution channels, replacing local foods with cheap processed items, often with the direct support of the government. Free trade and investment agreements have been critical to this process and the consequences for public health have been catastrophic.

Mexico's National Institute for Public Health released the results of a national survey of food security and nutrition in 2012. Between 1988 and 2012, the proportion of overweight women between the ages of 20 and 49 increased from 25 to 35% and the number of obese women in this age group increased from 9 to 37%. Some 29% of Mexican children between the ages of 5 and 11 were found to be overweight, as were 35% of the youngsters between 11 and 19, while one in ten school age children experienced anaemia.

Former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, concludes that trade policies had favoured a greater reliance on heavily processed and refined foods with a long shelf life rather than on the consumption of fresh and more perishable foods, particularly fruit and vegetables. He added that the overweight and obesity emergency that Mexico faces could have been avoided.

In 2015, the non-profit organisation [GRAIN reported](#) that the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) led to the direct investment in food processing and a change in Mexico's retail structure (towards supermarkets and convenience stores) as well as the emergence of global agribusiness and transnational food companies in the country.

NAFTA eliminated rules preventing foreign investors from owning more than 49% of a company. It also prohibited minimum amounts of domestic content in production and increased rights for foreign investors to retain profits and returns from initial investments. By 1999, US companies had invested 5.3 billion dollars in Mexico's food processing industry, a 25-fold increase in just 12 years.

US food corporations began to colonise the dominant food distribution networks of small-scale vendors, known as *tiendas* (corner shops). This helped spread nutritionally poor food as they allowed these corporations to sell and promote their foods to poorer populations in small towns and communities. By 2012, retail chains had displaced *tiendas* as Mexico's main source of food sales.

In Mexico, the loss of food sovereignty induced catastrophic changes to the nation's diet and many small-scale farmers lost their livelihoods, which was [accelerated by the dumping of surplus commodities](#) (produced at below the cost of production due to subsidies) from the US. NAFTA rapidly drove millions of Mexican farmers, ranchers and small businesspeople into bankruptcy, leading to the flight of millions of immigrant workers.

What happened in Mexico should serve as a warning to Indian farmers as global corporations seek to fully corporatise the agri-food sector through contract farming, the massive roll-back of public sector support systems, a reliance on imports (boosted by a future US trade deal) and the acceleration of large-scale (online) retail.

If you want to know the possible eventual fate of India's local markets and small retailers, look no further than what US Treasury Secretary [Steven Mnuchin said in 2019](#). He stated that Amazon had "destroyed the retail industry across the United States."

## Global vs local

Amazon's move into India encapsulates the unfair fight for space between local and global markets. There is a relative handful of multi-billionaires who own the corporations and platforms. And there are the interests of tens of millions of vendors and various small-scale enterprises who are regarded by these rich individuals as mere collateral damage to be displaced in their quest for ever greater profit.

Jeff Bezos, Amazon's executive chairman, aims to plunder India and eradicate millions of small traders and retailers and neighbourhood mom and pop shops.

This is a man with few scruples.

After returning from a brief flight to space in July 2021, in a rocket built by his private space company, Bezos said during a news conference:

"I also want to thank every Amazon employee and every Amazon customer because you guys paid for all of this."

In response, US congresswoman Nydia Velazquez wrote on Twitter:

"While Jeff Bezos is all over the news for paying to go to space, let's not forget the reality he has created here on Earth."

She added the [hashtag #WealthTaxNow](#) in reference to Amazon's tax dodging, revealed in numerous reports, not least the May 2021 study '[The Amazon Method: How to take advantage of the international state system to avoid paying tax](#)' by researchers at the University of London.

Little wonder that when Bezos visited India in January 2020, he was hardly welcomed with open arms.

Bezos praised India on Twitter by posting:

"Dynamism. Energy. Democracy. #IndianCentury."

The ruling party's top man in the BJP foreign affairs department hit back with:

"Please tell this to your employees in Washington DC. Otherwise, your charm offensive is likely to be waste of time and money."

A fitting response, albeit perplexing given the current administration's proposed sanctioning of the foreign takeover of the economy.

Bezos landed in India on the back of the country's antitrust regulator initiating a formal investigation of Amazon and with small store owners demonstrating in the streets. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) announced that members of its affiliate bodies across the country would stage sit-ins and public rallies in 300 cities in protest.

In a letter to PM Modi, prior to the visit of Bezos, the secretary of the CAIT, General Praveen Khandelwal, claimed that Amazon, like Walmart-owned Flipkart, was an "economic terrorist" due to its predatory pricing that "compelled the closure of thousands of small traders."

In 2020, Delhi Vyapar Mahasangh (DVM) filed a complaint against Amazon and Flipkart alleging that they favoured certain sellers over others on their platforms by offering them discounted fees and preferential listing. The DVM lobbies to promote the interests of small traders. It also raised concerns about Amazon and Flipkart entering into tie-ups with mobile phone manufacturers to sell phones exclusively on their platforms.

It was argued by DVM that this was anti-competitive behaviour as smaller traders could not purchase and sell these devices. Concerns were also raised over the flash sales and deep discounts offered by e-commerce companies, which could not be matched by small traders.

The CAIT estimates that in 2019 upwards of 50,000 mobile phone retailers were forced out of business by large e-commerce firms.

Amazon's internal documents, as revealed by Reuters, indicated that Amazon had an indirect ownership stake in a handful of sellers who made up most of the sales on its Indian platform. This is an issue because in India Amazon and Flipkart are legally allowed to function only as neutral platforms that facilitate transactions between third-party sellers and buyers for a fee.

The upshot is that India's Supreme Court recently ruled that Amazon must face investigation by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) for alleged anti-competitive business practices. The CCI said it would probe the deep

discounts, preferential listings and exclusionary tactics that Amazon and Flipkart are alleged to have used to destroy competition.

However, there are powerful forces that have been sitting on their hands as these companies have been running amok.

In August 2021, the CAIT [attacked the NITI Aayog](#) (the influential policy commission think tank of the Government of India) for interfering in e-commerce rules proposed by the Consumer Affairs Ministry.

The CAIT said that the think tank clearly seems to be under the pressure and influence of the foreign e-commerce giants.

The president of CAIT, BC Bhartia, stated that it is deeply shocking to see such a callous and indifferent attitude of the NITI Aayog, which has remained a silent spectator for so many years when:

“... the foreign e-commerce giants have circumvented every rule of the FDI policy and blatantly violated and destroyed the retail and e-commerce landscape of the country but have suddenly decided to open their mouth at a time when the proposed e-commerce rules will potentially end the malpractices of the e-commerce companies.”

But this is to be expected given the policy trajectory of the government.

During their protests against the three farm laws, farmers were teargassed, smeared in the media and beaten. Journalist [Satya Sagar notes](#) that government advisors feared that seeming to appear weak with the agitating farmers would not sit well with foreign agri-food investors and could stop the flow of big money into the sector – and the economy as a whole.

Policies are being governed by the drive to attract and retain foreign investment and maintain ‘market confidence’ by ceding to the demands of international capital. ‘Foreign direct investment’ has thus become the holy grail of the Modi-led administration.

Little wonder the government needed to be seen as acting ‘tough’ on protesting farmers because now, more than ever, attracting and retaining foreign reserves will be required to purchase food on the international

market once India surrenders responsibility for its food policy to private players by eliminating its buffer stocks.

The plan to radically restructure agri-food in the country is being sold to the public under the guise of ‘modernising’ the sector. And this is to be carried out by self-proclaimed ‘wealth creators’ like Zuckerberg, Bezos and Ambani who are highly experienced at creating wealth – for themselves.

It is clear who these ‘wealth creators’ create wealth for.

On the People’s Review site, [Tanmoy Ibrahim writes](#) a piece on India’s billionaire class, with a strong focus on Ambani and Adani. By outlining the nature of crony capitalism in India, it is clear that Modi’s ‘wealth creators’ are given carte blanche to plunder the public purse, people and the environment, while real wealth creators—not least farmers—are fighting for their existence.

The agrarian crisis and the recent protests should not be regarded as a battle between the government and farmers. If what happened in Mexico is anything to go by, the outcome will adversely affect the entire nation in terms of the further deterioration of public health and the loss of livelihoods.

Consider that rates of obesity in India have already tripled in the last two decades and the nation is fast becoming the diabetes and heart disease capital of the world. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), between 2005 and 2015 the number of obese people doubled, even though one in five children in the 5–9-year age group were found to be stunted.

This will be just part of the cost of handing over the sector to billionaire (comprador) capitalists Mukesh Ambani and Gautum Adani and Jeff Bezos (world’s richest person), Mark Zukerberg (world’s fourth richest person), the Cargill business family (14 billionaires) and the Walmart business family (richest in the US).

These individuals aim to siphon off the wealth of India’s agri-food sector while denying the livelihoods of many millions of small-scale farmers and local mom and pop retailers while undermining the health of the nation.

Hundreds of thousands of farmers attended a rally in the city of Muzaffarnagar in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh on 5 September 2021. A similar number turned out for other rallies in the state.

Rakesh Tikait, a prominent farmers' leader, said this would breathe fresh life into the Indian farmers' protest movement. He added:

“We will intensify our protest by going to every single city and town of Uttar Pradesh to convey the message that Modi's government is anti-farmer.”

Tikait is a leader of the protest movement and a spokesperson of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Indian Farmers' Union).

Until the repeal of the three farm laws, stating in November 2020, tens of thousands of farmers were encamped on the outskirts of Delhi in protest against the laws what would have amounted to effectively handing over the agri-food sector to corporates and placing India at the mercy of international commodity and financial markets for its food security.

Aside from the rallies in Uttar Pradesh, thousands more farmers gathered in Karnal in the state of Haryana to continue to pressurise the Modi-led government to repeal the laws. This particular protest was also in response to police violence during another demonstration, also in Karnal (200 km north of Delhi), during late August when farmers had been blocking a highway. The police Lathi-charged them and at least 10 people were injured and one person died from a heart attack a day later.

A video that appeared on social media showed Ayush Sinha, a top government official, encouraging officers to “[smash the heads of farmers](#)” if they broke through the barricades placed on the highway.

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar criticised the choice of words but said that “strictness had to be maintained to ensure law and order”.

But that is not quite true. “Strictness”—outright brutality—must be imposed to placate the scavengers abroad who are circling overhead with India's agri-food sector firmly in their sights.

As much as the authorities try to distance themselves from such language—‘smashing heads’ is precisely what India’s rulers and the billionaire owners of foreign agri-food corporations require.

The government has to demonstrate to global agri-capital that it is being tough on farmers in order to maintain ‘market confidence’ and attract foreign direct investment into the sector (aka the takeover of the sector).

Although it has now somewhat (temporarily) slowed with the repeal of the farm laws, the Indian government’s willingness to cede control of its agri-food sector would appear to represent a victory for US foreign policy.

Economist [Prof Michael Hudson](#) stated in 2014:

“It’s by agriculture and control of the food supply that American diplomacy has been able to control most of the Third World. The World Bank’s geopolitical lending strategy has been to turn countries into food deficit areas by convincing them to grow cash crops—plantation export crops—not to feed themselves with their own food crops.”

The control of global agriculture has been a tentacle of US capitalism’s geopolitical strategy. The Green Revolution was exported courtesy of [oil-rich interests](#) and poorer nations adopted agri-capital’s chemical- and oil-dependent model of agriculture that required loans for inputs and related infrastructure development. It entailed trapping nations into a globalised system of debt bondage, rigged trade relations and a system vulnerable to oil price shocks.

A December 2020 photograph published by the Press Trust of India defines the Indian government’s approach to protesting farmers. It shows a security official in paramilitary garb raising a lathi. An elder from the Sikh farming community was about to feel its full force.

But ‘smashing the heads of farmers’ is symbolic of how near-totalitarian ‘liberal democracies’ the world over now regards many within their own populations.

## Chapter 6

### Ongoing Corporate Capture of Indian Agriculture

*Written in November 2024*

In October 2024, Indian journalist Bharat Dogra [noted the following trend in agriculture](#):

“Small farmers are being displaced and family farms are disappearing as those who are truly dedicated to farming have to say tearful farewells to their farms, while billionaires and richest corporations acquire millions of acres of farmland. While small scale food processors too are being pushed out and possibilities of direct contacts between farmers and consumers to promote sustainable livelihoods based on making available healthy food to all are diminishing, giant multinational companies are taking up food production, trade and processing in ways that are harmful for both consumers and farmers.”

It might be an inconvenient truth for big agribusiness, land investors and agritech concerns that prefer large-scale industrial agriculture, but [small-scale farmers and peasants feed most of the world](#). That means the types of farms Dogra refers to. What is more, [small farms are more productive than their larger counterparts, which is why they are essential for food security](#).

However, the trend noted by Dogra is apparent across the world. And it is something that, as yet, is still in the early stages in India. But have no doubt, this is the plan for India too, where small-scale farmers make up 85% of the farming community.

In late 2021, the Indian government announced that three important farm laws, which would have introduced neoliberal shock therapy to the agricultural sector, would be repealed after a one-year farmers’ mobilisation against the legislation.

The repeal of the three laws was little more than a tactical manoeuvre given that state elections were upcoming in key rural heartlands in 2022. The

powerful global interests behind the legislation have not gone away and farmers' concerns remain highly relevant.

These interests have been behind a decades-long agenda to displace the prevailing agri-food system in India. The laws might have been struck down, but the goal to capture and radically restructure the sector remains. The farmers' struggle in India is not over.

The repeal of the controversial farm laws in India may have been seen as a victory for protesting farmers, but it seems the government is pursuing alternative strategies to achieve similar agricultural reforms. These new approaches, while less direct, could potentially implement many of the changes originally proposed in the repealed legislation.

The government seems to be gradually introducing smaller, incremental changes to agricultural policies that align with some of the original goals of the farm laws. For instance, an increased focus on digitalisation and technological solutions in agriculture could indirectly achieve some of the aims of the laws, and encouraging private investment and partnerships in the agricultural sector through other means could still lead to increased corporatisation.

This chapter and the following chapters will address this and will discuss the implications of a number of agreements between the Indian government and the likes of Amazon, Bayer and Syngenta that had little to no democratic oversight.

But we will begin by looking at the claim that the BJP-led government was seeking to extract revenge for the humiliating defeat it suffered at the hands of the farmers. This claim was made during a press conference that took place in Delhi in October 2023 held by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) (United Farmers Front).

The SKM was formed in November 2020 as a coalition of more than 40 Indian farmers' unions to coordinate non-violent resistance against the three farm acts initiated two months before.

Asserting that the laws violated the constitution and were anti-farmer and pro big business, the SKM announced renewed agitation and expressed

grave concern about a crackdown by the government against the online media platform NewsClick, which supported the farmers throughout their one-year struggle.

Those present heard that there has been “baseless dishonest and false allegations in the NewsClick FIR against the historic farmers’ struggle” and that the “FIR accuses the farmers’ movement as anti-national, funded by foreign and terrorist forces.”

An FIR is a ‘first information report’: a document prepared by police in India when they receive information about the commission of a “cognisable” (serious) offence.

Delhi Police issued an FIR against NewsClick founder Prabir Purkayastha and the human resources head Amit Chakravarty, which infers that the farmers’ movement was aimed at stopping the supply of essential goods for citizens and creating law and order issues.

An article on The Hindu newspaper’s Frontline portal describes the nature of the FIR, which goes far beyond the farmers’ issue, and concludes police actions along with the FIR marks a major low point for media freedom in India.

[According to Frontline](#), the police raids on the offices of NewsClick and the residences of virtually anyone associated with it; the indiscriminate seizure of the electronic devices of journalists and other employees; the sealing of the news portal’s main office; the arrest of its founder-editor and its administrative officer on terrorism-related charges; and the searches conducted at the premises of NewsClick and the home of its founder-editor mark the lowest point for media freedom in India since the Emergency of 1975-1977.

The withdrawal of the FIR against NewsClick was called for during the press conference. There was also a demand for the immediate release of NewsClick journalists.

The SKM said that farmers across the country would burn copies of the FIR on 6 November 2023 after a sustained campaign at village level against the government’s pro-corporate policies from 1-5 November.

The farmers' coalition also pledged to campaign in five poll-going states with the slogan "Oppose Corporate, Punish BJP, Save Country."

It was also announced that a 72-hour sit-in would take place in front of the Raj Bhawans (official residences of state governors) in state capitals between 26 and 28 November.

On November 13, 2024, the Supreme Court of India declared Purkayastha's arrest and subsequent remand as invalid, emphasising that he and his legal counsel were not provided with the grounds for his arrest prior to his remand hearing. The court criticised the police for circumventing due process and noted that the lack of communication regarding the grounds of arrest severely hindered Purkayastha's ability to defend himself. The Supreme Court's ruling mandated his release upon fulfilling bail bond requirements set by the trial court. The case highlights ongoing concerns regarding press freedom in India, particularly in relation to government actions against journalists and media outlets perceived as critical of state policies.

The SKM stated that the farmers' movement was committed and patriotic and saw through the "nefarious plan" of the three farm laws to withdraw government support from agriculture and hand over farming, mandis (state-run wholesale agricultural markets) and public food distribution to corporations led by Adani, Ambani, Tata, Cargill, Pepsi, Walmart, Bayer, Amazon and others.

It added that the farmers exposed the corporate-backed plan of depriving the people of India of food security, pauperising farmers, changing cropping patterns to suit corporations and allowing the free penetration of foreign corporations into India's food processing market.

Those in attendance also heard about the hardships experienced by farmers during the one-year agitation:

"In the process, the farmers braved water cannons, teargas shelling, roadblocks with huge containers, deep road cuts, lathi charge, cold and hot weather. Over 13 months, they sacrificed 732 martyrs... This was a patriotic

movement of the highest quality in the face of repression by a fascist government serving interests of Imperialist exploiters.”

State investment in agriculture infrastructure was called for, along with the promotion of profitable farming, the facilitation and securing of modern food processing, marketing and consumer networks under the collective ownership and control of peasant-worker cooperatives.

Accusing the government of acting on behalf of corporate interests, one speaker said that it had targeted Newsclick because it only did what a genuine news media should have been doing—reporting on the truth, the problems of farmers and the nature of the struggle.

It was claimed that:

“The BJP Government is using the farcical FIR to spread a canard that the farmers’ movement was anti-people, anti-national and backed by terrorist funding routed through Newsclick. This is factually wrong and mischievously inserted to portray the movement in bad light and seeking to extract revenge for the humiliating defeat they suffered at the hands of the farmers of our country.”

The farmers’ coalition argued that the government is moving to falsely charge the farmers movement of being foreign funded and sponsored by terrorist forces, while it is “promoting FDI, Foreign MNCs, big corporations into agriculture.”

The coalition said it remains committed to saving the rural economy, preventing foreign looting and rejuvenating the village economy in order to build a strong India.

In 2024, farmers were still protesting. Facilitation of the neoliberal corporatisation of farming that sparked the previous protest remains on the board and farmers’ demands have not been met.

However, to date, current farmers’ resistance lacks the momentum of the 2020-21 protests. Furthermore, by one means or another, as the following chapters indicate, the central government continues to ignore the key demands of farmers and hand over the sector to global agribusiness and other corporate interests

Farmers produce humanities' most essential need and are not the 'enemy within'. The spotlight should fall on the 'enemy beyond'. Instead of depicting farmers as 'anti-national', as sections of the media and prominent commentators in India try to, the focus needs to be on challenging those interests that seek to gain from undermining India's food security and sovereignty and the impoverishment of farmers.

## Chapter 7

### Amazon Gets Fresh, Bayer Loves Basmati

*Written in July 2024 (with an addition from October 2024)*

The citizens of India have a problem. In what the media like to call ‘the world’s biggest democracy’, there is a serious, proven conflict of interest among officials in the areas of science, agriculture and agricultural research that results in privileging the needs of powerful private interests ahead of farmers and ordinary people.

This has been a longstanding concern. In 2013, for instance, prominent campaigner and environmentalist [Aruna Rodrigues](#) said:

“The Ministry of Agriculture has handed Monsanto and the industry access to our agri-research public institutions, placing them in a position to seriously influence agri-policy in India. You cannot have a conflict of interest larger or more alarming than this one.”

In 2020, Kavitha Kuruganti (Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture) [stated that](#) the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee had acted more like a servant for Monsanto: there is an ongoing revolving door between crop developers (even patent holders) and regulators, with developers-cum-lobbyists sitting on regulatory bodies.

However, the capture of public policymaking space by the private sector is set to accelerate due to a recent spate of memorandums of understanding between state institutions and influential private corporations involved in agriculture and agricultural services, including Bayer and Amazon.

#### **Corporate capture**

As part of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the [Indian Council of Agricultural Research \(ICAR\) and Amazon](#) (June 2023), farmers will produce for Amazon Fresh stores in India as part of a ‘farm to fork’ supply chain. It will see “critical inputs” in agriculture and “season-based crop plans” in collaboration with Amazon based on “technologies, capacity building and transfer of new knowledge.”

This corporate jargon ties in with the much-publicised notion of ‘data-driven agriculture’ centred on cloud-based data information services (which Amazon also offers). In this model, data is to be accessed and controlled by corporates and the farmer will be told how much production is expected, how much rain is anticipated, what type of soil quality there is, what must be produced and what type of genetically engineered seeds and inputs they must purchase and from whom.

This amounts to a [recolonisation of Indian agriculture](#), which will eventually involve a handful of data owners (Microsoft, Amazon etc.), input suppliers (Bayer, Corteva, Syngenta etc.) and retail concerns (Amazon and Walmart-Flipkart—both firms already control 60% of India’s e-commerce market) at the heights of the agrifood economy, determining the nature of agriculture and peddling industrial food. Farmers who remain in this AI-driven system (a stated aim is farmerless farms) will be reduced to exploitable labour at the mercy of global conglomerates.

This is part of a broader strategy to shift hundreds of millions out of agriculture, ensure India’s food dependence on global finance and foreign corporations and eradicate any semblance of food democracy (or national sovereignty).

In addition to the MoU with Amazon, an MoU was signed between the ICAR and Bayer in September 2023. Bayer (it bought Monsanto in 2018), which profits from various [environmentally harmful](#) and [disease-causing](#) chemicals like glyphosate, signed the MoU to help “develop resource-efficient, climate-resilient solutions for crops, varieties, crop protection, weed and mechanization”, according to the ICAR website.

The ICAR is responsible for co-ordinating agricultural education and research in India, and Bayer seems likely to exploit the ICAR’s vast infrastructure and networks to pursue its own commercial plans, including boosting sales of toxic proprietary products.

But that’s not all. According to the non-profit GRAIN in its article ‘[The corporate agenda behind carbon farming](#)’, Bayer is gaining increasing control over farmers in various countries, dictating exactly how they farm and what inputs they use through its Carbon Program.

GRAIN says:

“You can see in the evolution of Bayer’s programmes that, for corporations, carbon farming is all about increasing their control within the food system. It’s certainly [not about sequestering carbon](#).”

Given the seriousness of what is laid out by GRAIN in its article, India’s citizens and farmers should take heed, especially as the ICAR website states that a focus of the MoU with Bayer will be on developing carbon credit markets.

In a [letter \(July 2004\)](#) to Rabindra Padaria, principal scientist at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), and Himanshu Pathak, director-general of the ICAR, Aruna Rodrigues says:

“Inking in ICAR’s formal partnership with Bayer (Monsanto) quite simply confirms straightforwardly that the ICAR protects its interest, which is the same as those of Bayer-Monsanto, large chemical/herbicide corporates... the ICAR has ditched its mandate to Indian farmers and farming, which is to promote farmer interests as a priority in an unbiased and objective assessment of what is right and good for Indian farming and food... “

A separate [citizens’ letter](#) was also sent to Pathak on the various MoUs that the Indian government has signed with influential private corporations. Hundreds of scientists, farmer leaders, farmers and ordinary citizens signed the letter.

It states:

“Bayer is a company notorious for its anti-people, anti-nature business products and operations in itself and, furthermore, after its takeover of Monsanto. Its deadly poisons have violated basic human rights of peoples across the world, and it is a company that has always prioritised profits over people and planet.”

It goes on to say that it is not clear what the ICAR will learn from Bayer that the well-paid public sector scientists of the institution cannot develop themselves. The letter says entities that have been responsible for causing an economic and environmental crisis in Indian agriculture are being partnered by ICAR for so-called solutions when these entities are only

interested in their profits and not sustainability (or any other nomenclature they use).

The letter asks that the ICAR suspends the signed MoUs, shares all details in the public domain and desists from signing any more such MoUs without necessary public debate.

However, on 19 July 2024, there were reports that the ICAR had signed another MoU, this time with Syngenta for promoting climate resilient agriculture and training programmes. In response, the authors of the letter state that the ICAR has (again) partnered with a corporation that has a track record of anti-nature and anti-people activities, selling toxic products like paraquat, class action suits against its corn seeds and anti-competitive behaviour.

What we are seeing is part of a broader geopolitical strategy to ensure India's food dependence on foreign corporations and eradicate any semblance of food democracy (or indeed national sovereignty).

In a [October 2024 report](#), GRAIN.org sheds some light:

“Jayachandra Sharma, a farmer leader from India's Karnataka Rajya Ryot Sangha farmer union, sees these developments and the digitalisation of agriculture as part of a broader strategy to push millions of farmers out of agriculture and make India's food supply dependent on global finance and foreign corporations. Given how companies like Microsoft, Syngenta, Amazon and JD.com are expanding, he could well be right.”

### **Mutagenic HT rice**

It is becoming clear who the ICAR actually serves. Let us return to Aruna Rodrigues and her letter to Rabindra Padaria (IARI) and Himanshu Pathak (ICAR) for additional insight.

Rodrigues' letter focuses on the commercial cultivation of basmati rice varieties tolerant to imazethapyr-based, non-selective herbicides. These chemicals can be liberally sprayed on herbicide tolerant (HT) crops because the crops have been manipulated to withstand the toxic impacts of spraying.

The HT varieties of rice have undergone some form of mutagenesis rather than genetic engineering. Mutagenesis has traditionally involved subjecting plant cells to chemical or physical agents (for example, radiation) that cause mutations to the DNA in the hope that a resulting mutation may produce a desirable effect in the plant. This kind of mutation breeding has been used for decades but only affects a [minority](#) of the plants on the market. Industry [watchdog GMWatch](#) says this risky technology (mutagenesis breeding) in the past managed to escape regulation.

So, this HT crop by the mutagenesis route is not defined as ‘genetic engineering’ (the method usually used to create HT crops) and therefore falls outside the purview of current regulations on genetically modified organisms.

Although the Supreme Court-appointed Technical Expert Committee (TEC) bars HT crops (a) for being an HT crop and (b) on account of contamination of crops in a centre of genetic diversity, it has been a long-standing aim of biotech companies like Bayer (Monsanto) to get HT crops cultivated in India.

Rodrigues asks:

“Is it a deliberate decision of the ICAR to use the mutagenesis route to produce HT rice varieties (tolerant to imazethapyr) with the explicit objective to bypass the formal regulation of GE crops/GMOs?”

Rodrigues accuses the ICAR of effectively ditching its mandate to Indian farmers, many of whom regard organic farming as their competitive advantage. This step is also a potential threat to India’s export markets, which are based on organic standards, along with the necessary co-surety that India’s foods and farms are not contaminated by herbicides, a consequence of using HT crops.

By adding a trait for herbicide tolerance, the ICAR is informed:

“ICAR’s action directly impacts this vital issue of contaminating our germ plasm in rice and contravenes a Supreme Court Order of “No Contamination”. Furthermore, our export markets for basmati are in excess of US \$5 billion in 2023-24. Your action will also directly impact India’s

exports and thereby, impact farmer export potential, incomes and income opportunities that premium prices provide.”

Moreover, Rodrigues asserts that the entire mutagenesis process for HT rice must be elaborated, especially when the mutant variety is for the purpose of human consumption.

The ICAR is duty-bound to provide, for example, whether a physical or a chemical mutagen was used, the range of doses used and the toxicity for the said material, the herbicide(s) used (a key concern, given the effects of certain herbicides on human health—see below) to test the HT of the basmati rice being used, the concentrations of the herbicides used and the genetic mechanism by which HT rice through mutagenesis has a resistant gene to imazethapyr.

While the issue of intellectual property rights for the HT rice varieties using mutagenesis is unclear, the ICAR and IARI have executed a technology transfer agreement of the HT trait for commercial cultivation.

### **Failed technology**

In her letter, Rodrigues states that, based on empirical evidence of 35 years of HT crops in the US and Argentina, HT crops are a failed technology: it spawns super weeds, increased herbicide use and no added performance yield. Moreover, for India, HT crops are a perverse use of technology, whether genetic engineering or through mutagenesis, that risks small and marginal farmers’ crops and herbs and plants used in many Ayurvedic medicines because of herbicide drift. It will also uniquely impact the employment of women in weeding.

Rodrigues goes on to state (with evidence provided) that in the US overall herbicide use has increased more than tenfold since the introduction of HT Crops (1992-2012 figure). In addition, HT crops are designed for monocultures and completely unsuited to Indian small-holder, multi-crop farming: anything not HT will be destroyed, the resistant crop stands, but everything else dies, including non-target organisms.

The herbicides used with HT crops are also a major human health issue. There is a strong link between glyphosate and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. In

relation to this, there are more than 100,000 lawsuits winding their way through US Courts.

Glyphosate (used in Bayer's Roundup herbicide) is also an endocrine disruptor and is linked to birth defects. Monsanto and the US Environmental Protection Agency had both known for over 40 years that glyphosate and its formulations cause cancer.

Other herbicides used by Bayer include glufosinate (used in its Liberty herbicide), which is acknowledged as more toxic than glyphosate and, like it, is a systemic, broad spectrum, non-selective herbicide. It is a neurotoxin that can cause nerve damage and birth defects and is damaging to most plants that come into contact with it.

Glufosinate is banned in Europe and not permitted in India. It has been implicated in brain developmental abnormalities in animal studies and is very persistent in the environment, so it will certainly contaminate water supplies in addition to food where it will be absorbed.

Imazethapyr (contained in Bayer's Aduel herbicide) is also a systemic broad-spectrum herbicide and is banned in some countries and not approved for use in the EU.

Prof. Jack Heinemann (University of Canterbury in New Zealand) adds that the likes of imazethapyr must be tested for their ability to cause bacterial antibiotic resistance. An important concern given that India's population has some of the highest levels of antibiotic resistance in the world. Any spread of HT crops would put people at severe risk of resistance and disease.

Despite these environmental and health concerns, the herbicide market in India is projected to grow by [around 54%](#) in the next five years, from USD 361.85 million in 2024 to USD 558.17 million by 2029.

Rodrigues concludes:

“In view of the above evidence of serious irreversible harm to health, food and agriculture across several dimensions and contravention of the PP (Precautionary Principle), it is a required scientific response for the ICAR to

immediately withdraw HT rice varieties and desist from introducing any HT crop through mutagenesis.”

## Chapter 8

# GMOs Essential to Feed India?

*Written in January 2020*

A common industry claim is that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are essential to agriculture if we are to feed an ever-growing global population. Supporters of genetically engineered crops argue that by increasing productivity and yields, this technology will also help boost farmers' incomes and lift many out of poverty.

Although it will be argued that the performance of GM crops to date has been questionable to say the least, the main contention is that the pro-GMO lobby, both outside of India and within, has wasted no time in wrenching the issues of hunger and poverty from their political contexts to use notions of 'helping farmers' and 'feeding the world' as lynchpins of its promotional strategy.

There exists a 'haughty imperialism' within the pro-GMO scientific lobby that aggressively pushes for a GMO 'solution' which is a distraction from the root causes of poverty, hunger and malnutrition and genuine solutions based on food justice and food sovereignty.

In 2019, [in the journal Current Science](#), Dr Deepak Pental, developer of GM mustard at Delhi University, responded to a previous paper in the same journal by eminent scientists [PC Kesavan and MS Swaminathan](#), which questioned the efficacy of and the need for GMOs in agriculture. Pental argued that the two authors had aligned themselves with environmentalists and ideologues who have mindlessly attacked the use of genetic engineering technology to improve crops required for meeting the food and nutritional needs of a global population that is predicted to peak at 11.2 billion.

Pental added that aspects of the two authors' analysis reflect their ideological proclivities.

The use of the word ‘mindlessly’ is telling and betrays Pental’s own ideological disposition. His words reflect tired industry-inspired rhetoric that says criticisms of this technology are driven by ideology not fact.

If hunger and malnutrition are to be tackled effectively, the pro-GMO lobby must put aside this type of rhetoric, which is designed to close down debate. It should accept valid concerns about the GMO paradigm and be willing to consider why the world already produces enough to feed [10 billion people](#) but over [two billion](#) are experiencing micronutrient deficiencies (of which [821 million](#) were classed as chronically undernourished in 2018).

### **Critics: valid concerns or ideologues?**

The performance of GM crops has been a hotly contested issue and, as highlighted in Kevasan and Swaminathan’s piece [and by others](#), there is already sufficient evidence to question their efficacy, especially that of herbicide-tolerant crops (which by 2007 already accounted for approximately 80% of biotech-derived crops grown globally) and the devastating impacts on the environment, human health and food security.

We should not accept the premise that only GMOs can solve problems in agriculture. In their paper, Kesavan and Swaminathan argue that GMO technology is supplementary and must be need based. In more than 99% of cases, they say that time-honoured conventional breeding is sufficient. In this respect, conventional options and innovations that [outperform GMOs](#) must not be overlooked or sidelined in a rush by powerful interests like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to facilitate the introduction of GM crops into global agriculture; crops which are highly financially lucrative for the corporations behind them.

In Europe, robust regulatory mechanisms have to date been in place for GMOs because it is recognised that GMO food/crops are not substantially equivalent to their non-GMO counterparts. Numerous studies have highlighted the [flawed premise](#) of ‘substantial equivalence’. Furthermore, from the outset of the GMO project, the [sidelining of serious concerns](#) about the technology has occurred and despite industry claims to the contrary, there is no scientific consensus on the health impacts of

GM crops as noted by [Hilbeck et al](#) (Environmental Sciences Europe, 2015). Adopting a precautionary principle where GM is concerned is therefore a [valid approach](#).

As Hilbeck et al note, both the Cartagena Protocol and Codex share a precautionary approach to GE crops and foods, in that they agree that GE differs from conventional breeding and that safety assessments should be required before GMOs are used in food or released into the environment. There is sufficient reason to hold back on commercialising GM crops and to subject each GMO to independent, transparent environmental, social, economic and health impact evaluations.

Critics' concerns cannot therefore be brushed aside by claims that 'the science' is decided and the 'facts' about GMOs are indisputable. Such claims are merely political posturing and part of a strategy to tip the policy agenda in favour of GMOs.

In India, various high-level reports have advised against the adoption of GM crops. Appointed by the Supreme Court, the 'Technical Expert Committee (TEC) Final Report' (2013) was scathing about India's prevailing regulatory system and highlighted its inadequacies and serious inherent conflicts of interest. The TEC recommended a 10-year moratorium on the commercial release of all GE crops.

As we have seen with the push to get GM mustard commercialised, the problems described by the TEC persist. Through her numerous submissions to the Supreme Court, Aruna Rodrigues, as lead petitioner in a public interest litigation, has argued that GM mustard is being pushed through based on outright regulatory delinquency. It must also be noted that this crop is herbicide tolerant, which, as stated by the TEC, is wholly inappropriate for India with its small biodiverse, multi-cropping farms.

While the above discussion has only scratched the surface, it is fair to say that criticisms of GMO technology and various restrictions and moratoriums have not been driven by 'mindless' proclivities.

## Can GM crops ‘feed the world’?

The ‘gene revolution’ is sometimes regarded as Green Revolution 2.0. The Green Revolution too was sold under the guise of ‘feeding the world’. However, emerging research indicates that in India it merely led to more wheat in the diet, while food productivity per capita [showed no increase or actually decreased](#).

Globally, the Green Revolution dovetailed with the consolidation of an emerging global food regime based on agro-export mono-cropping (often with non-food commodities taking up prime agricultural land) and (unfair) liberalised trade, linked to sovereign debt repayment and World Bank/IMF structural adjustment-privatisation directives. The outcomes have included a displacement of a food-producing peasantry, the consolidation of Western agri-food oligopolies and the transformation of many countries [from food self-sufficiency into food deficit areas](#).

And yet, the corporations behind this system of dependency and their lobbyists waste no time in spreading the message that this is the route to achieving food security. Their interests lie in ‘business as usual’.

Today, we hear terms like ‘foreign direct investment’ and making India ‘business friendly’, but behind the rhetoric lies the hard-nosed approach of globalised capitalism. The intention is for India’s displaced cultivators to be retrained to work as cheap labour in the West’s offshored plants. India is to be a fully incorporated subsidiary of global capitalism, with its agri-food sector restructured for the needs of global supply chains and a reserve army of labour that effectively serves to beat workers and unions in the West into submission.

Global food insecurity and malnutrition are not the result of a lack of productivity. As long as the dynamics outlined above persist and food injustice remains an inbuilt feature of the global food regime, the rhetoric of GMOs being necessary for feeding the world will be seen for what it is: bombast.

Although India [fares poorly](#) in world hunger assessments, the country has achieved self-sufficiency in food grains and has ensured there is enough

food (in terms of calories) available to feed its entire population. It is [the world's largest producer of](#) milk, pulses and millets and the second-largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnuts, vegetables, fruit and cotton. (Self-sufficiency is somewhat narrowly defined here: India still relies on imported inputs like fertilisers, for instance.)

[According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), food security is achieved when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

Food security for many Indians remains a distant dream. Large sections of India's population do not have enough food available to remain healthy nor do they have sufficiently diverse diets that provide adequate levels of micronutrients. The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey 2016-18 is the first-ever nationally representative nutrition survey of children and adolescents in India. It found that 35% of children under five were stunted, 22% of school-age children were stunted while 24% of adolescents were thin for their age.

People are not hungry in India because its farmers do not produce enough food. Hunger and malnutrition result from various factors, including inadequate food distribution, (gender) inequality and poverty; in fact, the country [continues to export food](#) while millions remain hungry. It's a case of 'scarcity' amid abundance.

Where farmers' livelihoods are concerned, the pro-GMO lobby says GM will boost productivity and help secure cultivators a better income. Again, this is misleading: it ignores crucial political and economic contexts. [Even with bumper harvests](#), Indian farmers still find themselves in financial distress.

India's farmers are not experiencing financial hardship due to low productivity. They are reeling from [the effects of neoliberal policies](#) and years of neglect and a withdrawal of state support, part of a deliberate strategy to displace smallholder agriculture at the behest of the World Bank and predatory global agri-food corporations. Little wonder then that the calorie and essential nutrient intake of the rural poor has [drastically fallen](#).

However, aside from putting a positive spin on the questionable performance of GMO agriculture, the pro-GMO lobby, both outside of India and within, has wasted no time in wrenching these issues from their political contexts to use the notions of ‘helping farmers’ and ‘feeding the world’ as lynchpins of its promotional strategy.

### **GM never intended to feed the world**

Many of the traditional practices of India’s small farmers are [now recognised](#) as sophisticated and appropriate for high-productive, sustainable agriculture. It is no surprise therefore that a July 2019 [FAO high-level report](#) called for agroecology and smallholder farmers to be prioritised and invested in to achieve global sustainable food security. It argues that scaling up agroecology offers potential solutions to many of the world’s most pressing problems, whether, for instance, climate change and carbon storage, soil degradation, water shortages, unemployment or food security.

Agroecological principles represent a shift away from the reductionist yield-output industrial paradigm, which results in among other things enormous pressures on soil and water resources, to a more integrated low-input systems approach to food and agriculture that prioritises local food security, local calorific production, cropping patterns and diverse nutrition production per acre, water table stability, climate resilience, good soil structure and the ability to cope with evolving pests and disease pressures. Such a system would be underpinned by a concept of food sovereignty, based on optimal self-sufficiency, the right to culturally appropriate food and local ownership and stewardship of common resources, such as land, water, soil and seeds.

Traditional production systems rely on the knowledge and expertise of farmers in contrast to imported ‘solutions’. Yet, if we take cotton cultivation in India as an example, farmers continue to be nudged away from traditional methods of farming and are being pushed towards (illegal) GM herbicide-tolerant cotton seeds.

Researchers [Glenn Stone and Andrew Flachs](#) note the results of this shift from traditional practices to date does not appear to have benefited farmers. This isn’t about giving farmers ‘choice’ where GMO seeds and

associated chemicals are concerned. It is more about GM seed companies and weedicide manufactures seeking to leverage a highly lucrative market.

The potential for herbicide market growth in India is enormous. The objective involves opening India to GM seeds with herbicide tolerance traits, the biotechnology industry's biggest money maker by far (86% of the world's GM crop acres in 2015 contain plants resistant to glyphosate or glufosinate, and there is a new generation of crops resistant to 2,4-D coming through).

The aim is to break farmers' traditional pathways and move them onto corporate biotech/chemical treadmills for the benefit of industry.

Calls for agroecology and highlighting the benefits of traditional, small-scale agriculture are not based on a romantic yearning for the past or 'the peasantry'. [Available evidence](#) suggests that (non-GMO) smallholder farming using low-input methods is more productive in total output than large-scale industrial farms and can be more profitable and resilient to climate change.

It is for good reason that the FAO high-level report referred to earlier as well as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Prof Hilal Elver, call for investment in this type of agriculture, which is centred on small farms. Despite the pressures, including the fact that globally industrial agriculture grabs [80% of subsidies and 90% of research funds](#), smallholder agriculture plays a [major role](#) in feeding the world.

That's a huge amount of subsidies and funds to support a system that is only made profitable as a result of these financial injections and because agri-food oligopolies externalize [the massive health, social and environmental costs](#) of their operations.

But policy makers tend to accept that profit-driven transnational corporations have a legitimate claim to be owners and custodians of natural assets (the 'commons'). These corporations, their lobbyists and their political representatives have succeeded in cementing a '[thick legitimacy](#)' among policy makers for their vision of agriculture.

From World Bank 'enabling the business of agriculture' directives to the World Trade Organization 'agreement on agriculture' and trade related intellectual property agreements, international bodies have enshrined the interests of corporations that seek to monopolise seeds, land, water, biodiversity and other natural assets that belong to us all. These corporations, the promoters of GMO agriculture, are not offering a 'solution' for farmers' impoverishment or hunger; GM seeds are little more than a value capture mechanism.

To evaluate the pro-GMO lobby's rhetoric that GM is needed to 'feed the world', we first need to understand the dynamics of a globalised food system that fuels hunger and malnutrition against a backdrop of (subsidised) food overproduction. We must acknowledge the destructive, predatory dynamics of capitalism and the need for agri-food giants to maintain profits by seeking out new (foreign) markets and displacing existing systems of production with ones that serve their bottom line. And we need to reject a deceptive '[haughty imperialism](#)' within the pro-GMO scientific lobby which aggressively pushes for a GMO 'solution'.

## Chapter 9

# Reckless Gamble for Profit that Placed Indian Cotton Farmers in Corporate Noose

*Written in December 2018*

The dubious performance (failure) of genetically engineered Bt cotton, officially India's only GM crop, should serve as a warning as the push within the country to adopt GM across a wide range of food crops continues. This article provides an outline of some key reports and papers that have appeared in the last few years on Bt cotton in India.

In a [paper](#) that appeared in December 2018 in the journal Current Science, P C Kesavan and M S Swaminathan cited research findings to support the view that Bt insecticidal cotton has been a failure in India and has not provided livelihood security for mainly resource-poor, small and marginal farmers. This paper was not just important because of its content but also because M.S. Swaminathan is considered to be the father of the Green Revolution in India.

The two authors provided evidence that indicates Bt crops are unsustainable and have not decreased the need for toxic chemical pesticides, the reason for these GM crops in the first place.

The authors cite the views of Dr K.R. Kranthi, former Director of the Central Institute for Cotton Research in Nagpur. Based on his research, [he concluded](#) in December 2016:

“Bt-cotton plus higher fertilizers plus increased irrigation also received a protective cover from the seed treatment of neonicotinoid insecticides such as imidacloprid, without which majority of the Bt-cotton hybrids which were susceptible to sucking pests would have yielded far less. It can safely be said that yield increase in India would not have happened with Bt-cotton alone without enhanced fertilizer usage, without increased irrigation, without seed treatment chemicals, and the absence of drought-free decade.”

In effect, levels of insecticide use are now back to the pre-Bt era as is productivity due to pest resistance and crop failures.

Following on from this, an [April 2018 paper](#) in the journal Pest Science Management indicates there has been progressive bollworm resistance to Bt cotton in India over a seven-year period. The authors conclude:

“High PBW [pink bollworm] larval recovery on Bt-II in conjunction with high  $LC_{50}$  values for Cry1Ac and Cry2Ab in major cotton-growing districts of central and southern India provides evidence of field-evolved resistance in PBW to Bt-I and Bt-II cotton.”

This alongside other problems related to Bt cotton has had disastrous consequences for farmers. In a 2015 paper [Professor Andrew Paul Gutierrez and his colleagues](#) say:

“Bt cotton may be economic in irrigated cotton, whereas costs of Bt seed and insecticide increase the risk of farmer bankruptcy in low-yield rainfed cotton. Inability to use saved seed and inadequate agronomic information trap cotton farmers on biotechnology and insecticide treadmills. Annual suicide rates in rainfed areas are inversely related to farm size and yield, and directly related to increases in Bt cotton adoption (i.e., costs).”

In a new December 2018 paper, [Gutierrez sends](#) a warning to those considering rolling out GM food crops in India:

“... recent calls by industry and its clients to extend implementation of the hybrid technology in aubergine (brinjal, eggplant) and mustard and likely other crops in India will only mirror the disastrous implementation of the failed hybrid Bt technology in Indian cotton and, will only serve to tighten the economic hybrid technology noose on still more subsistence farmers for the sake of profits.”

He concludes that Bt cotton has placed many resource-poor farmers in a stranglehold. Bt cotton prevents seed saving and farmers must purchase costly seed, which leads to suboptimal planting densities. Stagnant/low yields have followed, insecticide use has grown and new pests resistant to insecticide/Bt toxins have emerged.

Gutierrez says that leading Indian agronomists have proposed that adoption of pure-line high density short-season varieties of rainfed cotton which could more than double current yields and would avoid heavy infestations of pink bollworm, thus reducing insecticide use and pesticide disruption. This cotton is not a new technology and predates Bt cotton.

Given what Gutierrez says, it is quite timely that Kesavan and Swaminathan question regulators' failure in India to carry out a socio-economic assessment of GMO impacts on resource-poor small and marginal farmers. They call for "able economists who are familiar with and will prioritize rural livelihoods and the interests of resource-poor small and marginal farmers rather than serve corporate interests and their profits."

This mirrors what Gutierrez and his colleagues argued in 2015 that policy makers need holistic analysis before new technologies are implemented in agricultural development.

Naturally, corporations and many pro-GM scientists wish to avoid such things as much as possible. They try to convince policy makers that as long as the science on GM is sound (which [it isn't](#), despite what they proclaim), GM should be rolled out regardless. They regard regulators and regulations as a mere hindrance that is preventing GM from helping farmers.

Deregulating GM is the order of the day. It's a reckless approach. We need only look at Indian cotton farmers whose lives and livelihoods have been devastated due to the ill-thought-out roll-out of Bt technology.

Kesavan and Swaminathan criticise India's GMO regulating bodies due to a lack of competency and endemic conflicts of interest and a lack of expertise in GMO risk assessment protocols, including food safety assessment and the assessment of environmental impacts. Many of these issues have been a common thread in five high-level official reports in India that have advised against the commercialisation of GM crops:

The 'Jairam Ramesh Report', imposing an indefinite moratorium on Bt Brinjal [February 2010];

The 'Sopory Committee Report' [August 2012];

The ‘Parliamentary Standing Committee’ [PSC] Report on GM crops [August 2012];

The ‘Technical Expert Committee [TEC] Final Report’ [June-July 2013]; and

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science & Technology, Environment and Forests [August 2017].

In her numerous submissions to India’s Supreme Court, prominent campaigner Aruna Rodrigues has been scathing. She [recently told me that](#):

“It is proven in copious evidence in the Supreme Court in the last 13 years that our regulators are seriously conflicted: they promote GMOs openly, fund them (as with herbicide-tolerant mustard and other public sector GMOs) and then regulate them. Truth is a massive casualty. This is not lightly stated.”

She added that “failed hybrid Bt cotton in India” has put farmers on a pesticide treadmill as increasing levels of pest resistance becomes manifest.

Prior to this, in 2017, [Rodrigues also said](#):

“Never has an agri-tech been sold as a ‘magic bean’ to farmers, like Bt cotton, with opprobrium attaching to our regulators and ministries of governance who supported and continue to support this technology-castle built on sand, in the absence of evidence and when the hard data said the opposite.”

In the rush to plant these ‘magic beans’, the area planted under Bt cotton has often displaced vital food crops at a time when India should surely have been looking to achieve food security and self-sufficiency.

Writing in India’s [The Statesman newspaper](#) in 2015, for example, the knife-edge existence of the people that rich corporations profit from was highlighted in the case of Babu Lal and his wife Mirdi Bai who had been traditionally cultivating wheat, maize and millet on their farmland in Rajasthan. Their crops provided food for several months a year to the 10-member family as well as fodder for farm and dairy animals, integral to the mixed farming system employed.

Company agents (unspecified – but Monsanto and its subsidiaries dominate the GM cotton industry in India) approached the family with the promise of a lump-sum payment to plant Bt cotton seeds in two of their fields. Lal purchased pesticides to help grow the seeds in the hope of receiving the payment, which never materialised because the company agent said the seeds produced had ‘failed’ in tests.

The family faced economic ruin, not least because the food harvest was much lower than normal as the best fields and most labour and resources had been devoted to Bt cotton. It resulted in Lal borrowing from private moneylenders at a high interest rate to meet the needs of food and fodder. On top of this, the company’s agent allegedly started harassing Lal for a payment of about 10,000 rupees in lieu of the fertilisers and pesticides provided to him. Several other tribal farmers in the area also fell into this trap.

The promise of a lump-sum cash payment can be very enticing to poor farmers, and when companies co-opt influential villagers to get new farmers to agree to plant Bt cotton, farmers are reluctant to decline the offer. When production is declared as having failed, solely at the company’s discretion it seems, a family becomes indebted.

According to that article, there was growing evidence that the trend to experiment with Bt cotton has disrupted food security in certain areas and had introduced various health hazards and had damaged soil due to the use of chemical inputs.

Before finishing, it is certainly worth mentioning Stone and Flachs’s [2017 paper](#) on how certain interests within and beyond India are attempting to break traditional farming cotton cultivation practices with the aim of placing farmers on yet another corporate treadmill. This time, the aim appears to be to introduce herbicide-tolerant (HT) cotton in India on the back of Bt cotton. The authors indicate just how hugely financially lucrative for corporations the relatively ‘undeveloped’ herbicide market is in India. These HT cotton seeds have now appeared illegally on the market.

Ultimately, as Gutierrez implies, the bottom line is cynical corporate interest and profit – not helping Indian farmers or some high-minded notion about feeding the world. Just ask Babu Lal and thousands like him!

Of course, given the track record of HT crops, it is another disaster in the making for Indian farmers and the environment. This warning has already been made clear by the Supreme Court appointed Technical Expert Committee, which regards HT crops as being wholly inappropriate for India.

With various GM crops waiting in the wings, India should continue to adopt a precautionary approach towards GMOs as advocated by Jairam Ramesh and not implement another reckless gamble with farmers' livelihoods, the nation's health and the environment. About nine years ago, based on a rigorous consultation with international scientific experts regarding the commercialisation of Bt brinjal, Ramesh concluded that without any management of resistance evolution, Bt brinjal would fail in 4-12 years. Jairam Ramesh pronounced a moratorium on Bt brinjal in February 2010 founded on what he called "a cautious, precautionary principle-based approach."

Isn't such failure what we now witness with Bt cotton? It serves as a timely warning for implementing a widespread GMO food crop regime in India. The writing is on the wall.

## Chapter 10

### From Monsanto to Bayer: Worst of Both Worlds

*Written in October 2024*

Environmentalist and campaigner Rosemary Mason has been [relentlessly exposing](#) the insidious effects of agrochemicals on human health and the environment through a decade-long series of incisive reports. Many of these reports have taken the form of scathing open letters directed at corporations, regulators and officials in the UK and the EU.

Mason has never held back in her condemnations of the agrochemical giants. After Bayer's acquisition of Monsanto in 2018, her focus sharpened on Bayer, scrutinising its troubling history and its actions, not least during one of humanity's darkest chapters: Nazi Germany.

Bayer's complicity as part of IG Farben, a chemical and pharmaceutical conglomerate notorious for its involvement in war crimes, is well documented. The company was formed in 1925 from a merger of six chemical firms: Agfa, BASF, Bayer, Chemische Fabrik Griesheim-Elektron, Hoechst and Weiler-ter-Meer.

Bayer was not merely an observer but an active participant in heinous medical experiments conducted on concentration camp inmates. These experiments involved testing drugs on unwilling subjects, including those at Auschwitz, where prisoners were deliberately infected with diseases to evaluate Bayer's pharmaceuticals.

During World War I, Bayer was involved in the development of chemical weapons, including chlorine and mustard gas. As part of IG Farben, Bayer later contributed to the creation of nerve agents like Tabun, Sarin and Soman. Post-war, Bayer transitioned these chemical developments into pesticides such as parathion, which are neurotoxic.

In addition, IG Farben was implicated in the production of Zyklon B, the gas used in concentration camps. Executives from IG Farben were convicted for their roles in war crimes at the Nuremberg Trials.

Bayer's leadership was fully aware of these atrocities yet chose profit over ethics, benefiting from the forced labour of concentration camp inmates to produce essential chemicals for the Nazi war machine.

The aftermath of World War II saw Bayer and other IG Farben companies face minimal repercussions for their actions. While some executives were tried, they received light sentences or were released early, allowing them to reclaim positions of power within their companies.

As for Bayer, things did not stop with the end of the war.

The [Powerbase](#) website provides a very long list of Bayer's corporate wrongdoings since 1945, including allegations of corporate bullying, monopolistic practices, the suppression of scientific information, bribery, poisonings, false advertising and abusing workers.

More recently, Bayer has inherited a legacy of deception through its acquisition of Monsanto. Both companies have been accused of concealing the health risks associated with glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup and the world's most used agricultural herbicide. Internal documents reveal a concerted effort to downplay glyphosate's carcinogenicity while ignoring substantial evidence indicating its dangers to human health.

In her numerous reports, Mason has indicated how Bayer shaped regulatory processes to secure product approvals, influencing scientific studies and regulatory decisions while suppressing contrary evidence. The environmental devastation wrought by pesticides is alarming: Mason cites significant declines in biodiversity and poisoned ecosystems that she claims are as a direct consequence of the widespread use of Bayer's chemicals.

Moreover, rising cancer rates in communities exposed to Bayer's products cannot be ignored, especially increasing cases of non-Hodgkin lymphoma linked to glyphosate use in areas heavily treated with these chemicals.

Rosemary Mason is not alone in her condemnation of Bayer. For instance, journalist Carey Gillam has written extensively about Bayer-Monsanto's practices, particularly in relation to glyphosate and its health impacts in the

book 'Whitewash: The Story of a Weed Killer, Cancer, and the Corruption of Science'.

[Gillam says:](#)

“US Roundup litigation began in 2015 after the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen. Internal Monsanto documents dating back decades show that the company was aware of scientific research linking its weed killer to cancer but instead of warning consumers, the company worked to suppress the information and manipulate scientific literature.”

### **Hit lists and lobbying**

Gillam has shown that, over the years, Monsanto mounted a deceitful defence of its health- and environment-damaging Roundup and its genetically modified crops, and it orchestrated toxic smear campaigns against anyone—scientist or campaigner—who threatened its interests.

With that in mind, it comes as no surprise that a US-Based PR firm has created a watchlist, profiling activists, scientists and journalists who are critical of pesticide use and genetically modified organisms, as recently revealed in documents obtained by the investigative newsroom [Lighthouse Reports](#).

As a result of a year-long investigation, Lighthouse Reports argues that this operation seeks to cast pesticide critics, environmental scientists or campaigners as an anti-science “protest industry” and used US government money to do so.

The watchlist is the brainchild of Jay Byrne, a former communications executive at Monsanto, and his reputation management firm v-Fluence. It comprises profiles (including personal information) on hundreds of scientists, campaigners and writers. These profiles have been published on a private social network, which grants privileged access to 1,000 people comprising a who's-who of the agrochemical industry, alongside government officials from multiple countries.

The US government funded v-Fluence as part of its programme to promote genetically modified organisms in Africa and Asia, including “enhanced

monitoring” of critics of “modern agriculture approaches”—and to build the network.

Watchlists and hitlists aside, to further its interests, the agrochemical giants pour huge resources into lobbying that seeks to shape narratives, deceive and coerce rather than engage with genuine public health and environmental concerns.

The research and campaign group Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) recently took a [deep dive](#) into Bayer’s disturbing “toxic trail” of lobbying as the company strives to maintain its huge slice of the seed and pesticides markets, fight off regulatory challenges to its toxic products, limit legal liability and exercise political influence.

CEO’s report ‘Bayer’s Toxic Trails: Market Power, Monopolies and the Global Lobbying of an Agrochemicals Giant’ notes that Bayer spent between €7 million and €8 million in 2023 on EU lobbying, the biggest sum declared by any individual chemical company and the highest amount ever spent by Bayer on EU lobbying.

According to CEO, Bayer’s current top lobbying priority in Europe is to derail the original ambitions of the European Green Deal and to prevent any of the company’s firmly established interests (chemicals and pesticides) from being touched. One of the central goals of this deal is to reduce the use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030 through the EU’s Farm to Fork strategy. This target aims to address both environmental and public health concerns associated with pesticide use in agriculture.

Bayer’s lobby spend in the US has also risen considerably over the past few years, spending \$7.5 million in 2023 alone, some of which is aimed at securing changes in the law to prevent further litigation cases and more hefty payouts to people suffering from conditions due to glyphosate exposure. To date, the company has [reportedly paid out](#) approximately \$11 billion to settle nearly 100,000 lawsuits stemming from claims that Roundup causes cancer, particularly non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

CEO states:

“Bayer’s lobby tactics continue to capture public policymaking and in doing so hollow out democracy. A perverse symbiosis between corporate lobby groups and decision-makers has been actively created through its economic weight and large investments in many corners of the world, and this consistently leads to crucial decisions being made in favour of industry profits, rather than public interest.”

It concludes that:

“Around the world, Bayer’s modus operandi is not to work in the public interest but rather to capture public policy to serve its private interests and dividends of its shareholders, all while ignoring the public health and environmental impact of its activities.”

### **Be careful what you wish for**

So, why would a government want to do a deal with the devil?

As stated in the previous chapter, that is precisely what the government of India seems to have done when it signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bayer in September 2023. Bayer signed the MoU with the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR), which is responsible for co-ordinating agricultural education and research in India.

Bayer’s aim first and foremost seems to be to exploit the ICAR’s vast infrastructure and networks to pursue its own commercial plans, including boosting sales of toxic proprietary products and the introduction of genetically modified food crops into India. These crops would be reliant on Bayer’s agrochemicals.

Attempts to get genetically modified food crops into India’s fields is being done by all means necessary, as explained in Aruna Rodrigues insightful online article [Waltzing with Bayer Makes The Indian Council of Agricultural Research Blind: India Ditches Mandate to Farmers and Uses Mutagenesis to Drive Toxic HT Crops Into India.](#)

That article explains that mutagenetic techniques are being used to bypass existing regulatory procedures in relation to genetically modified organisms, despite a recent Supreme Court directive for the government to

formulate a national policy framework on genetically modified crops based on a democratic consultative process.

Telangana State Seed Development Corporation chairman S Anvesh Reddy recently [stated](#) that farmers want a bio-safety policy and not a promotional policy for genetically modified crops.

However, they are in danger of getting the latter. Prominent campaigner Kavitha Kuruganti has warned that the Ministry of Agriculture may bypass the democratic consultative processes recommended by the Supreme Court. It has already appointed a panel of ‘experts’ to draft the policy and information about it is being kept secret.

On X (formerly Twitter), agricultural policy specialist Devinder Sharma stated:

“How can a policy be framed for GM crops when there is still no consensus on the need for these crops? Despite heavy lobbying by industry, most countries oppose it.”

How can this be?

Let us turn to Aruna Rodrigues:

“Our regulatory bodies have been captured by the biotech and agrichemical industries... It is breathtaking; all pretence is gone. We have a cancer that is metastasising vertically and horizontally throughout the entire regulatory body.”

The need for genetically modified food crops is based on unsound logic, and, in general, neither farmers nor the public want them (see the online article [Challenging the Flawed Premise Behind Pushing GMOs into Indian Agriculture](#)). Moreover, the failure of Bt cotton in the country, India’s only officially approved genetically modified crop (see [The Failure of GMO Cotton In India on resilience.org](#)), should serve as a warning.

In the meantime, farmers’ leaders from 18 states in India have [resolved to oppose genetically modified crops](#). They say genetically modified organisms in agriculture are harmful to human and animal health, the

environment, farmers' livelihoods and trade and are based on failed promises.

## Chapter 11

### Bayer's 'Backward' Claim: Bid for Control of Indian Agriculture

*Written in October 2024*

For some critics, if one firm tops a league table for [anti-people, anti-nature](#) business practices, it is Bayer (although there are many other worthy candidates). Nevertheless, as previously stated, the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) signed a memorandum of understanding with Bayer in September 2023.

Bayer's approach to agricultural development involves promoting a model of industrial agriculture dependent on corporate products, including its toxic chemicals and genetically modified crops, and advocating for precision, data-driven agriculture that relies heavily on its proprietary technologies and software.

Simon Wiebusch, Country Divisional Head of Crop Science for Bayer South Asia, [recently stated](#) that India cannot become a 'developed nation' with 'backward' agriculture. He believes India's agriculture sector must modernise for the country to achieve developed nation status by 2047.

Bayer's vision for agriculture in India includes prioritising and fast-tracking approvals for its new products, introducing genetically modified food crops, addressing labour shortages (for weeding) by increasingly focusing on herbicides and developing herbicides for specific crops like paddy, wheat, sugarcane and maize.

Government institutions like the ICAR seem likely to allow Bayer to leverage the agency's infrastructure and networks to pursue its commercial plans.

Wiebusch's comments have received much media coverage. There is a tendency for journalists and media outlets to accept statements made by people in top corporate jobs as pearls of wisdom never to be critically questioned, especially in India when there is talk of the country achieving the gold standard in the eyes of some: 'developed status'. But people like

Wiebusch are hardly objective. They are not soothsayers who have an unbiased view of the world and its future.

Bayer has a view of what agriculture [should look like](#) and is gaining increasing control of farmers in various countries in terms of having a direct influence on how they farm and what inputs they use. Its digital platforms are intended to be one-stop shops for carbon credits, seeds, pesticides and fertilisers and agronomic advice, all supplied by the company, which gets the added benefit of control over the agronomic and financial data harvested from farms.

As for carbon credits, [the non-profit GRAIN](#) argues that, like digital platforms per se, carbon trading is about consolidating control within the food system and is certainly [not about sequestering carbon](#).

So, what does Wiebusch mean when he talks about modernisation of a backward agriculture in India? All of what is set out above and more.

Like Wiebusch, corporate lobbyists often refer to ‘modern agriculture’. Instead, we should really be advocating for a system that produces healthy food for all while sustaining farming communities and livelihoods. That’s because the term ‘modern agriculture’ is deliberately deceptive: it means a system dependent on proprietary inputs and integrated with corporate global supply chains. Anything other is defined as ‘backward’.

According to Bayer, Wiebusch is a star player who can drive market share and create business value for the company. On the [Bayer India](#) website it says: “Simon’s key strengths include unlocking business growth, redefining distribution strategies, driving change management and building diverse teams that drive market share and create business value.”

Stripped of the corporate jargon and any talk of ‘helping’ India, the goal is to secure control of the sector and ensure corporate dependency. That is what is really meant by creating business value and driving market share.

India has achieved self-sufficiency in food grains and has ensured there is enough food (in terms of calories) available to feed its entire population. It is [the world’s largest producer of](#) milk, pulses and millets and the second-

largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnuts, vegetables, fruit and cotton.

In 2014, environmental scientist Viva Kermani [stated](#) that India has been self-sufficient in food staples for over a decade and more than that for cereals. She noted that the country:

“... grows about 100 million tons (mt) of rice, 95 mt of wheat, 170 mt of vegetables, 85 mt of fruit, 40 mt of coarse cereals and 18 mt of pulses (refer to the Economic Survey for the data). These totals ensure that our farmers grow enough to feed all Indians well with food staples. We have 66 mt of grain, two-and-a-half times the required buffer stock (on January 1, 2013).”

She concluded:

“The country has reached this stage through, first and foremost, the knowledge and skill of our farmers who have bred and saved seed themselves and exchanged their seed in ways that made our fields so biodiverse.”

Kermani also observed that farmers have legitimate claims to being scientists, innovators, natural resource stewards, seed savers and hybridisation experts. However, they have too often been reduced to becoming recipients of technical fixes and consumers of the poisonous products of a growing agricultural inputs industry.

### **Who needs Bayer?**

It is clear that Bayer needs India for its corporate growth strategy, but who needs Bayer?

Bhaskar Save certainly did not on his impressively bountiful organic farm in Gujarat. In 2006, he described in an [eight-page open letter](#) (along with six annexures) to M S Swaminathan (widely regarded as the father of the Green Revolution in India) how the type of chemical-intensive agriculture that Bayer promotes and the urban-centric model of development favoured by the government has had devastating environmental economic and social consequences for India.

Save offered agroecological alternatives to address the problems, including solutions to boost farmer incomes and rural communities, cultivate a wider range of nutrient-dense crops, build soil fertility, improve water management, enhance on-farm ecology and increase biodiversity.

The prominent environmentalist Vandana Shiva recently posted on X:

“India’s agriculture was sustained over 10,000 years because it was based on nature’s laws of diversity, recycling, regeneration & circularity. Albert Howard spread organic farming worldwide learning from Indian peasants. Working with nature is sophistication, not backwardness.

“Bayer calling India’s agriculture backward is a new toxic colonisation. Bayer/Monsanto, the poison cartel whose roots are in war, has driven biodiversity to extinction with monocultures, spread cancers with glyphosate & herbicides, destroyed democracy.”

It seems that the ‘poor’ must be helped out of their awful ‘backwardness’ by the West and its powerful corporations and billionaire ‘philanthropists’ like Bill Gates. What some might regard as ‘backward’ stems from an ethnocentric ideology, which is used to legitimise the destruction of communities and economies that were once locally based and self-sufficient.

Bayer promotes a corporate expansionist ‘development’ agenda that is self-sustaining and can be described as anything but development (see the online article [Resisting Genetically Mutilated Food and the Eco-Modern Nightmare](#)).

Companies like Bayer present their technologies and products as fixes for the problems created by the model of ‘growth’ and ‘development’ they promote. ‘Scientific innovation’ is touted as the answer. The proposed solutions often create new problems or worsen existing ones. This leads to a cycle of dependency on corporate products and technologies.

Monsanto’s [failed](#) Bt cotton in India being a case in point.

Problems created by corporate-led development become opportunities for further corporate inputs and the commodification of knowledge and further

‘expert’ interventions. The primary motivation is financial gain rather than genuine societal improvement.

Corporate-driven ‘development’ is a misnomer, especially in agriculture, as it often leads to regression in terms of health, environmental sustainability and rural community resilience, while perpetuating a cycle of problems and ‘solutions’ that primarily benefit large corporations.

But the type of agroecological solutions presented by the likes of Bhaskar Save run counter to Bayer’s aims of more pesticides, more genetically modified organisms, more control and corporate consolidation. For example, as previously mentioned, the industry seeks to derail the EU’s farm to fork strategy (which involves a dramatic reduction in agrochemical use), and Bayer spends [record amounts](#) to shape policies to its advantage, courtesy of its entrenched lobbying networks.

Of course, Bayer presents its neocolonial aspirations in terms of helping backward Indian farmers. A good old dose of Western saviourism.

To promote its model, Bayer must appear to offer practical solutions. It uses the narrative of climate emergency to promote a Ponzi carbon trading scheme that is resulting in [land displacement](#) across the world. And Bayer says that labour shortages for manual weeding in Indian agriculture are a significant challenge, so the rollout of toxic herbicides like glyphosate are a necessity.

But there are several approaches to address this issue beyond relying on herbicides like glyphosate (it will kill all plants that do not have the herbicide tolerant trait), which is wholly unsuitable for a nation comprising so many small farms cultivating a diverse range of crops.

Mechanical weeding using animal-drawn or tractor-powered implements for larger farms is one solution, and there are several agronomic techniques that can help suppress weeds and reduce labour needs: crop rotation disrupts weed lifecycles, higher planting densities shade out weeds, proper fertilisation gives crops a competitive advantage and use of cover crops and mulches can suppress weed growth.

Even here, however, there are cynical attempts to get farmers to change their cultivation methods (with no tangible financial benefits) and move away from traditional systems.

In the article [The Ox Fall Down: Path Breaking and Treadmills in Indian Cotton Agriculture](#), for instance, we see farmers being nudged away from traditional planting methods and pushed towards a method inconducive to oxen ploughing but very conducive for herbicide-dependent weed management. That article notes the huge growth potential for herbicides in India, something companies like Bayer are keen to capitalise on.

Wiebusch talks of India reaching ‘developed status’. But what does the type of ‘development’ he proposes entail?

We need only look around us for the answer: decision-making centralised in the hands of government and corporate entities, traditional local governance structures weakened and standardised, top-down policies and corporate consolidation through mergers and acquisitions with local independent enterprises struggling to compete.

Consolidated corporations have greater lobbying power to shape regulations in their favour, further entrenching their market position. In other words, political centralisation and corporate consolidation are often intertwined. Centralised political structures tend to align with the interests of large, consolidated corporations, and both centralised governments and large corporations exert greater control over resources.

This dual process has led to reduced economic diversity and resilience, weakened local communities and traditions, increased vulnerability to systemic shocks and diminished democratic participation.

‘Developed status’ also means accelerated urbanisation, land amalgamations for industrial-scale farming and depopulation of the countryside. And it means farmers being encouraged to grow cash crops for export based on trade policies that work in favour of big landowners and heavily subsidised Western agriculture.

As mentioned earlier, it has been estimated that between 2016 and 2030, globally, [urban areas will have tripled in size](#), expanding into cropland and

undermining the productivity of agricultural systems. Around 60% of the world's cropland lies on the outskirts of cities. This land is, on average, twice as productive as land elsewhere on the globe.

As cities expand, millions of small-scale farmers are displaced. These farmers produce the [majority of food in the Global South](#) and are key to global food security.

A combination of urbanisation and policies [deliberately designed](#) to displace the food-producing peasantry will serve to boost the corporate takeover of India's agrifood sector. This is what Bayer calls 'development'.

But none of this is inevitable. Many of us know what the response should be: prioritising sustainable, locally appropriate solutions and restoring food sovereignty and the economic vibrancy of rural communities; focusing on holistic human well-being rather than narrow economic metrics of 'growth'; preserving traditional knowledge that underpins highly productive [farming practices](#) for the benefit of farmers, consumer health and the environment; and empowering communities through localism and decentralisation rather than creating state-corporate dependency.

Such solutions are markedly different from those characterised by rural population displacement, the subjugation of peoples and nature, nutrient-poor diets, degraded on-farm and off-farm ecosystems and corporate consolidation.

There are [alternative visions](#) for the future, alternative visions of human development. But these do not boost corporate margins or control and do not fit the hegemonic narrative of what passes for 'development'.

However, it is concerning that what Bayer advocates is regarded as the common sense of the age.

The ultimate coup d'état by the transnational agribusiness conglomerates is that state officials, scientists and journalists take as given that profit-driven Fortune 500 corporations have a legitimate claim to be custodians of natural assets. These corporations have convinced so many that they have the ultimate legitimacy to own, control and manage what is essentially humanity's commonwealth.

Water, food, soil, land and agriculture have been handed over to powerful transnational corporations to milk for profit as though they are serving the needs of humanity. Corporations which promote industrial agriculture have embedded themselves deeply within the policy-making machinery on both national and international levels.

The ultimate intertwining of political centralisation and corporate consolidation.

## Chapter 12

### Comforting Myth in a Dispossessed Reality

*Written in August 2025*

Every system of harm sustains itself through stories that soothe. Here, we turn to national narrative: how the comforting story of independence can mask new forms of dependency and how the symbols of freedom are used to quiet the unease of recolonisation.

As India celebrated its 78<sup>th</sup> Independence Day on 15 August 2025, the tricolour fluttered proudly across the nation. Speeches echoed the triumphs of freedom, resilience and progress. But beneath the patriotic fervour lay an uncomfortable truth: independence means little if the nation's food, land and farmers are being surrendered.

India is on the frontline in the global struggle for food sovereignty. Multinational corporations, backed by neoliberal policy frameworks and international financial institutions, are reshaping India's agricultural landscape—threatening farmer livelihoods and the very essence of democratic control over food systems.

India's agriculture is being systematically corporatised. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has signed memorandums of understanding with global giants like Bayer, Amazon and Syngenta.

These deals, made without public debate or transparency, pave the way for AI-driven farmerless farms, carbon credit schemes that commodify land, genetically modified and herbicide-tolerant crops and digital platforms that dictate farming practices. Although this is promoted as modernisation, it is more akin to recolonisation.

India's small and marginal farmers—who make up 85% of the farming community—are being pushed to the brink. Rising input costs, debt and lack of guaranteed prices are driving them off their land. The loss of traditional knowledge, biodiversity and rural resilience is also taking place. This displacement is not accidental but engineered and part of a broader neoliberal playbook.

The 2020–21 farmers’ protest was a powerful stand against this. Millions mobilised to resist three farm laws that threatened to accelerate neoliberal shock therapy and facilitate corporate control over agriculture. Though the laws were repealed, the underlying agenda remains intact. The government continues to promote policies that favour agribusiness over agrarian communities, often under the guise of technological innovation and efficiency.

We can already see the results of ‘innovative’ technological meddling via Green Revolution ideology and practices. For instance, modern rice and wheat varieties have lost up to 45% of their nutritional value, and arsenic levels in rice have also surged. Rice accumulates higher levels of inorganic arsenic than many other food crops, especially when grown in flooded paddies with arsenic-rich irrigation water, and modern rice varieties, particularly those bred during the Green Revolution, can absorb more arsenic than traditional varieties.

Additionally, agrochemical exposure and the spread of industrialised ultra-processed food are linked to increased levels of obesity, diabetes and cancer.

Yet Bayer—whose products include glyphosate and other toxic herbicides—is being welcomed into India’s agricultural institutions. Herbicide-tolerant basmati rice, developed through mutagenesis to bypass GMO regulations, threatens both human health and export markets.

Initiatives like AgriStack, developed in partnership with tech corporations like Microsoft, aim to digitise land records and farmer data—often without consent. Precision agriculture, carbon farming and platforms like Amazon’s farm-to-fork model are sold as solutions to various crises (perceived or otherwise), but they are tools of control.

Traditionally, farmers could be described as ethno-engineers: they used indigenous knowledge and practical innovations to manage local environments, soil, water and crops in sustainable ways. These farmers developed complex systems such as terracing, water harvesting, composting, mulching and mixed cropping, tailoring them to various climatic and geographical conditions.

Bayer believes this to be ‘backward’ and in need of its humanity-saving insights and miraculous technologies. Farmers enrolled in Bayer’s Climate FieldView or similar systems are being told what to grow, when to grow it and which inputs to buy. Their data is harvested and their autonomy eroded. Farmers are becoming mere cogs in a corporate machine. As a business model, it works—for Bayer.

But this is not just a technological transformation. Given that most of the population are still involved in making a living from agriculture, it is a civilisational one.

The agrarian crisis and the ongoing farmer protests should not be regarded as a battle between the government and farmers. The outcome will adversely affect the entire nation in terms of the further deterioration of public health and the loss of livelihoods and more migration to urban centres which themselves sprawl into more and more fertile agricultural land.

### **Myth making**

True independence is not just political—it is economic, ecological and cultural. It means the right to grow, distribute and consume food that is healthy, local and culturally appropriate; farming that works with nature, not against it; and policies shaped by farmers and citizens, not in corporate boardrooms.

India’s freedom struggle was against colonial rule. It was for dignity, self-reliance and justice. Today, the struggle continues against digital domination, corporate capture and ecological destruction.

But why does the belief in national independence persist in an age where it is increasingly apparent that hegemonic global capital and globalist neoliberal coercion shape policies rather than national governments—not just in India but also in Starmer-BlackRock’s Britain, Sweden, Germany and many if not most countries across the world?

The idea of independence is not merely a big lie rolled out to fool the people. It may be something more than just a case of ‘we rule you—we fool you’.

Cultural anthropologists like Clifford Geertz have shown how nations rely on symbolic narratives to forge collective identity. In this broader sense, ‘myth’ is not a simple falsehood but a shared symbolic idea that shapes how people see the world and motivates action.

Independence Day, with its flags, speeches and rituals, becomes a ceremony of reassurance, a way to reaffirm a story that may no longer align with material reality.

In other words, within the context of the argument presented here, ‘myth’ is any shared story or symbolic idea that shapes how people see the world and motivates action, even a modern, consciously constructed idea.

Myths offer emotional anchoring even though the reality may be that of recolonisation. Independence is increasingly symbolic (regardless of which country we live in), while actual control over land, food and data slips into the hands of finance capital and transnational corporations.

This is not to say that myths are not used by the powerful to mask systems of exploitation: the myth of independence functions as a kind of false consciousness, obscuring the material conditions of subjugation under global capitalism. The nation state, once imagined as a bulwark against imperialism, now often acts as a facilitator of neoliberal interests, managing populations while outsourcing sovereignty to markets.

Moreover, the idea of independence produces subjects who internalise the idea of freedom. Dependency becomes normalised through the language of progress, modernisation and development. Independence becomes a myth people believe and a disciplinary narrative that shapes how they live and what they are willing to accept.

However, myths are not monolithic. They are not only instruments of control. Throughout history, they have also been tools of liberation when reinterpreted by the people they inspire. Across Latin America, for example, the anti-colonial myth of Bolívar’s liberation has been revived by food sovereignty and land reform movements as a rallying cry against modern corporate control.

In India, elements of the freedom struggle's Swadeshi ethos have been reclaimed by contemporary seed-saving movements: farmers resist corporate seed monopolies by promoting indigenous crop varieties, linking self-reliance in seeds to genuine independence.

In this respect, myths are no longer a warm, comforting embrace divorced from reality. They become a tool for confronting and transforming that reality. So, the question is no longer whether independence is real but whether ordinary people—whether in an increasingly authoritarian Britain, in India or elsewhere—are willing to fight for the kind that cannot be outsourced, sold or silenced.

# Chapter 13

## Toxic Platter for India

*Written in January 2025*

Comforting myths are propagated by the state to normalise the reality of dispossession, making systemic theft seem natural or inevitable. But myths alone do not dispossess; they prepare the ground for policies that do.

Here, we follow the struggle over India's food and farming systems, where ideology meets everyday life and where farmers and citizens confront the tangible cost of abstract promises.

India could see an authoritarian central government with subordinate state governments under the control of corporate interests and international finance capital.

So says the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), a coalition of 40+ farmers' unions. It contends that the Union Government of India is proposing to undermine the federal rights of state governments by surrendering India's food security and compromising its national sovereignty under the slogan 'One Nation. One Market'.

In a December 2024 press release, the All India Kisan Sabha (All India Farmers Union, AIKS) called for nationwide protests against attempts to bring back the three repealed farm laws.

The AIKS said that the government has opted not to address any of the serious demands raised by the farmers' movement, including legalising the minimum support price (MSP), increasing public investment in agriculture and boosting pro-farmer credit facilities.

Like the SKM, the AIKS says there is an agenda to dismantle the power of the state governments. Proposed reforms to the agrifood sector seek to encroach upon the rights of state governments over agriculture, land, industry and markets. These are all areas that fall under individual states as per the Constitution of India.

## **NPFAM**

Pivotal to this plan is the newly introduced draft National Policy Framework on Agriculture Marketing (NPFAM). The SKM states that the NPFAM, if implemented, will erode the federal rights of the state governments and ignore the interests of farmers, agricultural workers, petty producers and small traders since there is no provision to ensure a minimum support price (MSP) and minimum wage for farmers and workers.

The NPFAM essentially marks the return of the three farm laws that were repealed in late 2021 due to a year-long mass protest by farmers. The SKM states that the farmers' movement sees through the plan to withdraw government support from agriculture and hand over farming and public food distribution to corporations led by Adani, Ambani, Tata, Cargill, Pepsi, Walmart, Bayer, Amazon and others.

The main proposal of the NPFAM is a fundamental restructuring of the existing agricultural marketing system, proposing its transformation into a Unified National Market linked to a Value Chain Centric Infrastructure.

The objective is the entry of corporate agribusiness and the conversion and integration (or eradication) of registered state-managed wholesale markets (mandis, overseen by state-regulated Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees, APMCs) and Grameen Haats (rural markets) with Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).

Reforms suggested in the NPFAM draft include the establishment of private wholesale markets, direct farm gate purchases by corporate processors and exporters, replacement of traditional market yards with corporate-controlled warehouses and silos and introducing a unified national market fee and trading license system.

The draft proposes that big corporations can purchase produce directly from farmers, bypassing APMC market yards. Additionally, handing over storage infrastructure to private corporations eliminates a critical safety net for farmers during price volatility and may pave the way for corporate exploitation by denying farmers any space for bargaining prices.

The NPFAM aims to integrate agricultural production and marketing in a way that prioritises corporate interests. It will integrate both the private and public sectors through advanced technologies such as blockchain. NPFAM reforms propose deregulation, effectively allowing the private sector—specifically, corporate agribusinesses—to establish dominance over production, processing and marketing.

We could see farmers produce raw materials that enter markets controlled by processing industries, trade houses and exporters, who in turn dictate the prices. The NPFAM fails to address provisions that would hold these corporate forces accountable.

There is no mention of ensuring an MSP for farmers, which was a central recommendation of the National Commission on Farmers chaired by the late M S Swaminathan and currently a key issue in the national political discourse.

That is no surprise because the corporate strategy is to procure produce at the cheapest rate and market it to ensure exorbitant profits.

The stranglehold of big business houses is also evident in the suggestions for deepening financialisation via futures and option markets. This will also permit corporations and international finance capital to dominate and control the domestic food industry.

The AIKS says that central government is creating a conducive atmosphere for the corporate loot of agriculture. It adds that it will fight tooth and nail the efforts by the government to hand Indian agriculture on a platter to transnational corporations. It demands that the government withdraw the NPFAM and engage in meaningful dialogue with farmers' organisations and state governments.

The structural parallels between the NPFAM and the 2020 farm laws are illustrated in the table below, adapted from an analysis by [liberation.org](https://liberation.org). As can be seen, the NPFAM is little more than a back-door entry of the three farm laws.

<b>Table 1 : Backdoor Entry- Three Farm Laws and Draft Agri-Marketing Policy</b>		
<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Three Farm Laws</b>	<b>Draft Policy Framework</b>
<b>Deregulation of APMC Markets</b>	Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Section 3: Allowed trading outside APMC mandis, bypassing state-regulated markets.	Promotes private markets and direct buying outside APMC mandis, reducing their role in agricultural trade.
<b>Promotion of Private Markets</b>	Section 5 of the Trade and Commerce Act: Allowed private players to set up markets outside APMC jurisdiction.	Encourages the creation of private markets and digital platforms for agricultural trade.
<b>Contract Farming</b>	Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, Section 7: Enabled contract farming with provisions favouring corporations in case of disputes.	Pushes contract farming as part of the "Agri-value chain," with no robust safeguards for farmers.
<b>Dispute Resolution</b>	Section 13 of the Price Assurance Act: Excluded civil courts, creating biased dispute resolution mechanisms favouring corporations.	Advocates arbitration-based grievance redressal, bypassing judicial processes for small farmers.
<b>Deregulation of Commodities</b>	Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020: Removed restrictions on stocking and trading of essential commodities.	Focuses on private storage infrastructure, effectively deregulating the storage of key commodities.
<b>Absence of MSP Guarantee</b>	Farm laws did not mandate Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops, leading to protests demanding a legal guarantee.	No mention of MSP in the draft framework, despite being a key demand of farmers.
<b>E-Trading Platforms</b>	Section 8 of the Trade and Commerce Act: Enabled electronic trading platforms for agricultural produce.	Promotes e-trading and digital marketplaces as alternatives to physical markets.
<b>Focus on Agri-Business Value Chain</b>	Laws promoted integration into global agribusiness supply chains.	Strong focus on integrating farmers into "value chains" with corporate players leading the process.

## Dismantling food security

The three repealed farm laws would have facilitated neoliberal shock therapy to India's agrifood sector. If it succeeds, the NPFAM will bring about what the laws intended to do. But first, state-supported infrastructure must be dismantled.

As things currently stand, mandis are state-regulated marketplaces where farmers sell their produce, facilitating direct transactions with buyers and ensuring fair prices through auctions. Managed by the APMCs, mandis play a crucial role in connecting farmers to larger markets and providing essential infrastructure for agricultural trade.

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is a government initiative aimed at ensuring food security for the underprivileged by distributing essential commodities at subsidised rates. Operated jointly by central and state governments, the PDS includes the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), ensuring focused assistance for those in need.

The Food Corporation of India (FCI) is responsible for implementing food policies, including the procurement, storage, transport and distribution of food grains. By procuring grains at an MSP and maintaining a vast network of depots and Fair Price Shops, the FCI plays a vital role in maintaining food security and nutritional support across the country.

Together, mandis, the PDS and the FCI form a comprehensive state-backed framework for supporting India's agricultural economy and addressing food insecurity.

However, the aim is for the state to withdraw from these areas and to let private interests capture the space left open. Indian agriculture has witnessed gross underinvestment over the years, whereby it is now wrongly depicted as a basket case and underperforming and ripe for a sell off to those very interests who had a stake in its underinvestment.

The aim is to restructure India's agri-food sector for the needs of global supply chains and markets. As independent cultivators are bankrupted, the goal is that land will eventually be amalgamated to facilitate large-scale industrial cultivation. Those who remain in farming will be absorbed into corporate supply chains and squeezed as they work on contracts dictated by large agribusiness and chain retailers.

The FCI has historically been a stabilising force in India's food procurement and distribution system, ensuring that (some) farmers receive fair prices through MSP while maintaining strategic food stocks. Once its role is

diminished, the Indian government may find itself purchasing essential commodities from volatile (manipulated) international markets using its foreign exchange reserves; food sourced from the very corporations that have replaced the FCI.

Companies like Bayer attempt to depict these developments as 'modernising' Indian agriculture and portray the sector as 'backward'. However, such corporations cynically exploit notions of backwardness and modernisation to promote their financially lucrative agricultural practices and technologies in a bid to secure control of the sector.

Prominent agricultural scientist M S Swaminathan (referred to earlier) highlighted that farmers' incomes are declining due to inadequate pricing mechanisms and market access, rather than a lack of technological advancements. He advocated for an MSP that is at least 50% above the cost of production to ensure farmers can sustain their livelihoods.

The failure to implement this has contributed significantly to the ongoing agrarian crisis. This situation has led to widespread farmer distress and suicides, which he attributed largely to economic pressures rather than technological shortcomings.

And this failure is a deliberate policy decision.

### **Deliberate policy to underinvest**

Instead of ensuring that all farmers have reliable access to markets where they can sell their produce at fair prices, improving access to timely and affordable credit to prevent farmers from falling into debt traps and strengthening procurement policies and expanding the mandi, MSP and public distribution systems, we are witnessing a reversal.

Farmers are being displaced through policies that intentionally render farming financially unviable. We also see policies aimed at facilitating the sale and consolidation of land for industrial agriculture and the undermining of rural communities and traditional farming practices.

Additionally, there is a concerning rise in health issues as traditional, nutritious diets are increasingly replaced by unhealthy, ultra-processed foods or less nutrient-dense alternatives.

If people want to see what the future may bring, look no further than countries reliant on the Western agrifood model. From cultivation to retail, a disease-causing system promoted and protected by corporate lobby groups like the International Life Sciences Institute and CropLife embedded in decision-making processes (both are already firmly established in India).

A system that sees international finance firms like BlackRock, Vanguard, State Street, Fidelity and Capital Group investing in the global food giants that sicken and also in the pharmaceuticals sector that supposedly ‘cure’.

A system handed over to agricultural land speculators, toxic agrochemical manufacturers and their proprietary hybridised seeds, global commodity traders and purveyors of junk food.

India is on course to be a subsidiary of global capital at the expense of its local agricultural communities and farmers, its ecosystems, its food security, its (limited) democracy and the overall wellbeing of the population.

Alternatively, MSPs via state procurement of essential crops and commodities could be extended to the likes of maize, cotton, oilseed and pulses. This would not only boost the nation’s health but also increase farmers’ incomes. At the moment, only farmers in certain states who produce rice and wheat are the main beneficiaries of government procurement at MSP.

Instead of rolling back the role of the public sector and surrendering the system to foreign corporations, there is a need to further expand official procurement and public distribution. That would cost around 20% of the handouts (‘incentives’) from the public purse received by corporations and their super-rich owners (based on 2020-21 figures).

During the 2020-21 farmers protest, a video that appeared on social media showed Ayush Sinha, a top government official, encouraging officers to “smash the heads of farmers” if they broke through the barricades placed on a highway.

Since the farmers renewed their protest in early 2024, tear gas and water cannons have been used against farmers to break up protests and prevent them marching to Delhi. The authorities must show international finance and agri-capital that they are being tough on farmers. They need to demonstrate that they remain steadfast in defeating the farmers movement in order to attract FDI (maintain 'market confidence') and pave the way for a corporate-financial takeover of the sector.

In late 2021, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait stated that around 750 protesters had died during the year-long struggle.

In summing up the situation, we may paraphrase renowned campaigner and environmentalist Aruna Rodrigues:

“It is a detailed horror tale in the making for India, handing over Indian sovereignty and food security to big business. There will come a time pretty soon when India will pay the Cargills, Ambanis, Bill Gates, Walmarts (in the absence of national buffer food stocks) to send us food, and it will finance borrowing from international markets to do it.”

Rodrigues foresees a policy shift to cash crops and the end to small-scale farmers, pushed aside by contract farming and GM crops.

What is at stake is the integrity of India's federal governance structure, its food security, the wellbeing of its farmers and farming communities and the overall health of the population.

Meanwhile, the future remains uncertain for what has become a more fragmented farmers' movement. Its capacity to regain momentum and draw in greater support from consumers and consumer groups against the neocolonial ambitions of global finance and foreign agricultural capital remains in question.

## Chapter 14

# India's Farmers: Unyielding Barrier to Corporate Domination of Agriculture

*Written in May 2025*

The Indian government's handling of agricultural reforms and farmer welfare since the massive farmers' protests of 2020-21 reveals a stark contrast in priorities. While committees and policies facilitating corporate interests and digital agriculture initiatives have been established and funded swiftly, crucial promises related to Minimum Support Price (MSP) guarantees and farmer welfare remain pending or inadequately addressed. This discrepancy is fuelling continuing farmer discontent and indicates where the government's priorities lie.

Since the repeal of the three contentious farm laws in late 2021, the government and its premier agricultural research body, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), have moved quickly to forge partnerships with multinational agribusiness corporations. The ICAR has signed multiple Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with global giants such as Bayer, Amazon and Syngenta within a short span from 2023 to 2024.

For instance, the ICAR-Bayer MoU signed in September 2023 focuses on developing resource-efficient, climate-resilient crop solutions, crop protection, mechanisation and carbon credit markets. Bayer, which has a history stretching back to involvement in Nazi death camps and is known for rolling out highly profitable, highly toxic agrochemicals, is now positioned to provide agronomic advisory services and mechanisation 'solutions' to farmers through ICAR's extensive network.

Similarly, the ICAR's collaboration with Amazon Kisan aims to leverage Amazon's supply chain and digital infrastructure to promote 'scientific' cultivation and ensure 'high-quality' produce reaches consumers via Amazon Fresh. The Syngenta Foundation India partnership, signed in July 2024, emphasises 'capacity-building' and training on 'climate-resilient' agriculture and 'precision-farming' technologies like drones and AI.

These partnerships are not simply about ‘modernising’ agriculture; they are about embedding corporate control at every node of the food system. What is being rolled out under the banners of ‘digital agriculture’ and ‘public-private partnership’ is, in reality, the systematic transfer of control over seeds, inputs, data and markets from farmers and public institutions to transnational corporations. The resulting food system will be tailored for profit extraction, not food security or farmer well-being.

Such MoUs, often signed without public scrutiny or democratic debate, represent a corporate power play that undermines both national sovereignty and the autonomy of smallholder farmers in particular. As the Mumbai-based [Janata Weekly](#) points out, the government’s willingness to fast-track these deals, while dragging its feet on MSP and procurement reforms, is a clear signal of where its allegiances lie.

The digitalisation of agriculture, under the guise of innovation, opens the door for data harvesting by global tech and agri-corporations, making farmers dependent on proprietary platforms and algorithms. This is, in effect, digital colonialism, where control over agricultural knowledge and decision-making shifts from the field to the corporate boardroom.

These rapid tie-ups with corporate interests are not incidental but deeply intertwined with the genesis of the farm laws themselves. Investigations and analyses reported by [Newsclick](#) reveal that the farm laws were largely crafted under the influence of corporate agribusiness interests, with significant involvement from the apex government think tank NITI Aayog.

According to [Newsclick](#), the farm laws originated from a proposal by Sharad Marathe, a US-based businessman with close ties to the ruling BJP party but no background in agriculture. Marathe’s vision, which advocated leasing farmland to corporate agribusinesses and reducing farmers to cogs in a corporate-controlled system, was quickly embraced by NITI Aayog. The think tank set up a task force dominated by big corporate players like Adani Group, Patanjali, BigBasket, Mahindra and ITC while excluding farmer representatives and independent experts.

This task force operated with secrecy and speed, recommending sweeping deregulation measures such as the dilution of the Essential Commodities

Act to lift stocking limits, facilitating corporate control over agricultural markets. The Adani Group, in particular, was a vocal proponent of these changes, which aligned closely with its business interests.

NITI Aayog's philosophy, according to Janata Weekly, equated what is good for agribusiness profits with what is good for Indian agriculture, sidelining the concerns of small and marginal farmers. This corporate-centric approach shaped the farm laws and subsequent policies, including the rapid MoUs with Bayer, Amazon and Syngenta, which further embed corporate influence in agriculture.

The narrative that 'what's good for corporate agribusiness is good for agriculture' is a dangerous fallacy. It reduces the farmer to a contract labourer, strips communities of control over their food systems and prioritises export-oriented, input-intensive farming over agroecology and food sovereignty.

By excluding independent scientists, farmer organisations and public-interest voices, NITI Aayog has enabled policy capture by corporate interests. The farm laws were the legislative embodiment of this capture, and their spirit lives on in ongoing policy and institutional reforms.

In stark contrast to the swift corporate collaborations, the government's promise to set up a committee to address MSP and related farmer demands has seen significant delays and limited action. Although a committee on MSP was announced following the farm laws' repeal, no substantive interim report or legal guarantee has emerged even years later.

Budgetary support for direct procurement schemes that ensure remunerative prices for farmers has been drastically cut or merged into broader schemes, diluting their effectiveness. There is a preference for relief payments over systemic reforms that would benefit farmers, as noted by [Janata Weekly](#).

Even here, while public money is poured into corporate-led 'innovation' and digital infrastructure, the actual safety nets that protect farmers from market volatility are being systematically eroded. It is basically austerity for

farmers and abundance for corporates, a hallmark of the neoliberal food regime, where public resources are redirected from social protection to subsidising private profit.

### **Repeal in name only**

Although the government formally repealed the three farm laws in November 2021 following sustained protests, the core objectives of these laws are being pursued through alternative means, effectively implementing the same reforms by stealth.

New policies such as the [National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing](#) (NPFAM) and ongoing efforts to promote contract farming, digital platforms for agricultural marketing and deregulation of state mandi (market) systems closely mirror the deregulatory and corporatisation goals of the repealed laws (Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) are primarily state backed. These APMCs operate under state governments, as agricultural marketing is a state subject in India. Mandis, which are regulated markets within the APMC system, play a crucial role in the agricultural economy.)

We are seeing backdoor strategies to open up agriculture to corporate control without legislative scrutiny or public debate: advancing the farm laws' agenda under a different name. The rollback of the farm laws was a tactical retreat, not a change of direction. The state continues to implement the core tenets of those laws. The result is policy by subterfuge, where the substance of corporate capture advances even as the symbols are withdrawn.

Janata Weekly's [analysis of the 2023–24 budget](#) and agricultural policies points to a clear political economy rationale: the government prioritises reforms that open agriculture to corporate investment and market forces over those that protect small and marginal farmers' incomes and livelihoods. The rapid initiation and funding of corporate-oriented committees and MoUs contrast sharply with the slow or symbolic handling of farmer demands.

This approach reflects a broader neoliberal agenda that views agriculture as a sector for market manipulation rather than social protection. It is part of a global trend. India's food system is being restructured to fit the template of a neoliberal food regime, one that privileges corporate consolidation, global supply chains and the commodification of everything from seeds to data. The losers are small farmers, rural communities and ultimately, the country's food security.

Despite the government's repeal of the farm laws, the farmers' agitation in India remains very much alive and active. Since February 2024, a renewed wave of protests has emerged, surpassing the previous 2020-21 agitation in duration and intensity, particularly in key agricultural states like Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh.

Farmers continue to demand a legal guarantee for MSP for all crops, comprehensive loan waivers and the rollback of new pro-corporate policies such as the NPFAM. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and other farmer unions have organised widespread protests, including road blockades, sit-ins and marches to district headquarters across India.

The government's response has included detentions of hundreds of farmers, bulldozing of protest sites and arrests of key leaders, including those undertaking indefinite hunger strikes. Despite this crackdown, farmers remain resolute, continuing to organise nationwide protests and drawing support from civil society groups and opposition political parties.

Farmers have also prepared detailed data to counter government claims about the cost and feasibility of implementing MSP guarantees. They continue to seek dialogue with the government, but meaningful engagement has been limited.

The Indian government has employed internet crackdowns as a key tactic to suppress the farmers' protests, both in the 2020-21 agitation and the renewed protests starting in 2024. According to Newsclick, authorities imposed temporary internet blackouts in protest-affected areas, such as seven districts in Haryana during 2024, aiming to disrupt communication among farmers and prevent the spread of information about the protests.

Similar shutdowns were used during the 2020-21 protests, including suspending mobile internet services in key protest zones around Delhi.

There has also been a targeted removal of social media accounts: the government issued executive orders to platforms like X to take down accounts of journalists, farmers' union leaders and supporters reporting on or backing the protests, limiting the movement's online visibility and outreach.

Overall, internet shutdowns and social media censorship have been significant tools in the state's efforts to curb the farmers' agitation and limit both domestic and international awareness and support. This, in part, explains why the renewed farmers' agitation in India has not garnered the same level of global support as the 2020-21 protest.

Moreover, as The Wire notes, the 2020-21 protests centred around the three farm laws, providing a clear rallying point that attracted global attention and solidarity. The current protests focus on broader and more complex demands such as legal guarantees for MSP, repeal of new policies perceived as similar to the withdrawn laws, pensions, debt waivers and opposition to WTO agreements. This diffusion of focus may dilute international engagement.

Meanwhile, the government accelerates digital and corporate-friendly reforms with enthusiasm. The promised MSP committee and related guarantees remain pending, exposing a gap between political rhetoric and action. And that gap persists because the aim is to make agriculture financially non-viable for smallholders, who make up the bulk of India's farmers, drive them to the cities and amalgamate their lands for the benefit of global agribusiness, industrialised agriculture and institutional land investors.

The repeal of the farm laws has not ended the push for corporatisation; rather, the government continues to advance these aims through new policies and partnerships. Until core farmer demands, especially legal MSP guarantees and income security, are addressed, the agitation and mistrust are likely to persist, reflecting the crisis at the heart of Indian agriculture.

This crisis, for farmers, stems from the ongoing corporate takeover of the sector that ultimately hinges on removing them from the land.

Unless India reclaims its food system for the public good, anchored in food sovereignty, agroecology and farmer rights, corporate capture will only deepen. The struggle of India's farmers is not just for their own survival, but for the very future of food, democracy and sovereignty in the country.

## Chapter 15

### Get Out and Stay Out: Quit India!

*Written in July 2025*

The Quit India Movement was launched by Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress on 8 August 1942, demanding the immediate end of British rule in India. It inspired a mass civil disobedience campaign featuring strikes, demonstrations and sabotage, despite the British arresting Gandhi and many Congress leaders immediately after the movement's start.

The movement saw remarkable nationwide participation—including women, students, workers and peasants. Although it was violently suppressed by the colonial authorities, it galvanised the struggle for independence. The Quit India Movement significantly weakened British authority, promoted unity among diverse groups and set the stage for India's eventual independence.

Now, in 2025, the spirit of the Quit India Movement is being explicitly invoked by today's farmer protests to inspire unity, resilience and a nationwide call to action.

#### **Farmers' demands ignored**

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM)—a coalition of 40-plus farmers' unions across India—is at the forefront of a continuing struggle against government policies that are eroding rural livelihoods, national sovereignty and federal governance. Their concerns centre on an emerging authoritarian central government controlled by corporate interests and international finance capital, which threatens to subordinate the role of India's states and dismantle vital protections for farmers and rural communities.

SKM, alongside allied organisations such as the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), argues that the Union Government's push for agricultural reforms under slogans like 'One Nation, One Market' jeopardises the constitutional federal structure. These reforms—including the draft National Policy

Framework on Agricultural Marketing (NPFAM)—seek to unify India’s disparate agricultural marketing systems into a [centralised, corporatised national market](#). According to the SKM, this transformation will severely diminish the decision-making power of state governments over agriculture, land, industry and markets—domains constitutionally assigned to them.

The NPFAM draft envisions a rescaling of agricultural marketing, replacing state-regulated wholesale markets (mandis) and rural *haats* with private, corporate-controlled entities integrated via Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and blockchain technologies. Under this model, powerful private corporations, including conglomerates like Adani, Ambani, Tata, Cargill, Pepsi, Walmart, Bayer and Amazon, would engage directly with farmers, bypassing traditional state-regulated market structures. The consolidation of storage facilities and marketing channels under corporate control raises fears of price manipulation and diminishes farmers’ negotiating power.

This change will essentially fundamentally restructure India’s agri-food sector and is aimed at integrating it deeply into global supply chains controlled by agribusiness and international finance capital. This is little more than a neocolonial strategy that would hand over India’s food security and agricultural governance to transnational corporations.

In 2025, farmers are still protesting. The roots of the protests can be traced back to the three farm laws introduced and subsequently repealed in late 2021 following widespread protests. The SKM and the AICS warn that the NPFAM is effectively a rebranded return of those laws, seeking to achieve their objectives through new policy frameworks.

Key elements of the NPFAM echo the earlier laws’ intent to deregulate markets, permit private agribusiness entry and promote contract farming under conditions favourable to corporate interests. The absence of legislative guarantees for a legal Minimum Support Price (MSP) and minimum wages for agricultural workers remains a still-unaddressed primary concern, as is the lack of accountability mechanisms to regulate corporate practices.

Farmers face the prospect of becoming mere producers of raw materials for corporate supply chains, with prices dictated by powerful processing

industries and exporters. The AICS stresses that central government proposals, including deepening financialisation via futures and options markets, will enable global corporations and financial firms to assert dominance over the food industry, intensifying farmers' economic vulnerabilities.

The critique extends to dismantling of India's longstanding food security frameworks:

- **Mandis and Marketing Boards:** mandis, regulated by Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs), provide farmers with auction-based sales platforms ensuring some degree of fair price discovery and market access. The NPFAM's corporatisation proposals threaten these markets' survival.
- **Public Distribution System (PDS):** India's PDS, facilitated by state and central governments, supplies subsidised essentials to millions, underpinning national nutritional security.
- **Food Corporation of India (FCI):** the FCI manages procurement at MSP, storage and food distribution, acting as a stabilising force in the agriculture sector.

Facilitating corporate interests, the government seeks the withdrawal of state involvement in these key institutions, exposing India to volatile international markets controlled by global agribusiness, thereby undermining food sovereignty and rural welfare.

In response to this proposed neoliberal shock therapy, the SKM has launched a series of coordinated protests to press their demands and safeguard farmers' rights.

### **Quit India**

On 'Quit India' Day on 13 August, symbolically invoking the historic Quit India Movement, farmers nationwide will conduct vehicle and tractor parades, public demonstrations and the burning of effigies representing Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This protest specifically targets proposed Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)—

particularly with the US—fearing they will exacerbate corporate dominance and market flooding with (GMO) cheap imports.

The date, 13 August, comes two days before Independence Day celebrations on 15 August. Something that may appear increasingly hollow as time marches on and we see the recolonisation of India's economy by foreign interests.

From 15 August, the campaign will include public hearings, grassroots mobilisation and awareness drives culminating in a large-scale worker-farmer protest action in Delhi and various state capitals on 26 November, marking five years since the historic farmers' protests at Delhi's borders.

The movement's core demands include a constitutionally or legally enforced MSP aligned with recommendations from the Swaminathan Commission, ensuring farmers receive at least 50% above the cost of production, loan waivers and financial relief tailored for farmers.

Farmers also want the withdrawal of bans on using 10-year-old tractors in the National Capital Region (NCR), the restoration of fertiliser subsidies, regulation of spurious agricultural inputs. Stronger state infrastructure to maintain food security is called for along with support for small-scale producers and meaningful dialogue involving farmer organisations and state governments.

Many of the key demands are long standing, but official responses to the protests and farmers' demands have sometimes involved tear gas, water cannons and other harsh measures, reflecting attempts to suppress dissent and reassure international investors of a stable climate for foreign direct investment. In late 2021, SKM leader Rakesh Tikait noted that around 750 protesters had died in the prolonged struggle.

Various officials have been recorded endorsing harsh crackdowns on demonstrators, further fuelling resentment and mistrust. This marks a broader trend of state suppression intended to clear the path for a corporate-financial takeover of the agricultural domain.

The SKM and the AKS protests and demands are well-founded.

In India, as elsewhere, we are seeing the erosion of traditional diets and farming practices, resulting in an increasing reliance on ultra-processed foods and global corporate supply chains.

Moreover, underinvestment in rural infrastructure and agriculture over decades has been deliberate, portraying Indian farming as backward and ripe for 'modernisation' that privileges corporate profit over food sovereignty.

Ultimately, the commodification and financialisation of food and agricultural land serves to further embed corporate influence at all levels, from seed to store (or, increasingly, e-commerce platform), paralleling a global pattern of food insecurity and corporate dominance.

India stands at a crossroads. The 2025 protest campaign reflects deeper battles over food sovereignty, federalism, rural livelihoods and the democratic rights of citizens. The struggle is not merely against specific trade deals or policies but against an overarching neoliberal agenda that threatens to fully disempower farmers and reshape India's agricultural landscape to suit global capital at the expense of millions.

# Chapter 16

## Corporate Cloud Poised to Reign Over India's Fields

*Written in October 2025*

Nearly four years after India's historic year-long farmers' protests forced the repeal of three pro-corporate farm laws, it is clear that the government's underlying agenda remains intact. The repeal was little more than a tactical retreat.

Today, the same agenda of corporatisation (recolonisation) is being advanced through bureaucratic schemes, digital agriculture partnerships and policy frameworks that promote 'efficiency' and 'modernisation'.

In the book [Food Dependency and Dispossession: Resisting the New World Order](#) (February 2022), I stated that repealing the three laws was:

"... little more than a tactical manoeuvre... The powerful global interests behind these laws have not gone away... These interests have been behind a decades-long agenda to displace the prevailing agri-food system in India... the goal and underlying framework to capture and radically restructure the sector remains. The farmers' struggle in India is not over."

The intention to impose neoliberal shock therapy on Indian agriculture has never waned and remains clear in central government schemes and public-private partnerships.

The Pradhan Mantri Dhan Dhaanya Krishi Yojana (PMDDKY) is now the government's flagship 'umbrella scheme' for agriculture. According to [reporting by The Wire](#), it merges 36 existing programmes across 11 ministries into a single centralised plan, ostensibly to promote convergence and coordination. But farmer unions and policy critics argue that it represents a massive centralisation of agricultural governance that moves power, funds and oversight away from state governments and into the hands of the Union Centre.

The scheme, they warn, could become a corporate Trojan horse, creating a framework through which public–private partnerships with firms such as ITC, Mahindra and Godrej can quietly take control of rural infrastructure and extension services. Under the guise of coordination, the state is vacating space for powerful corporations to occupy.

This creeping corporate control is being reinforced through the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), the country’s premier agricultural body. Between 2023 and 2024, ICAR signed a series of partnerships with multinational agribusiness and technology corporations, including Bayer, Amazon and Syngenta. Officially, these memoranda of understanding are about promoting ‘climate-resilient’ and ‘digital’ agriculture.

In reality, however, they mark a decisive step in outsourcing research, technology and data management to corporations, many of which have a history of [scientific deception, aggressive lobbying, subterfuge, vilifying critics and self-serving political manipulation](#).

Bayer, a company notorious for its history of toxic agrochemicals and monopolistic seed control, is now involved in designing carbon markets and crop-protection regimes. Amazon Kisan integrates India’s farm produce into its digital supply chains, effectively positioning the e-commerce giant as a gatekeeper between farmer and consumer. And Syngenta’s role in drone and AI-based ‘precision’ farming embeds expensive, proprietary technologies that make farmers dependent on corporate platforms.

Under the guise of ‘modernisation’, we are seeing the construction of a complex that binds farmers into new forms of digital corporate dependency. Knowledge, data and decision-making shifts from the field to the cloud.

Contrast this enthusiasm for state-corporate partnerships with the lack of progress on the promise of a legal guarantee for the minimum support price (MSP) (a floor price for various crops) made during the repeal of the farm laws in 2021. The committee on MSP formed that year has produced no tangible outcomes. Meanwhile, corporate collaborations move with

lightning speed and with little to no democratic oversight or accountability.

There is also the draft [National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing](#) (NPFAM), which farmer organisations such as the Samyukta Kisan Morcha and All India Kisan Sabha describe as the “return of the farm laws by stealth.” The framework’s talk of “market integration” and “value-chain infrastructure” closely mirrors the deregulation proposed in the repealed laws. It encourages the creation of private wholesale markets and permits direct procurement by corporate agribusinesses such as Cargill, Walmart and Amazon, bypassing state-regulated wholesale markets or mandis. It also envisions the gradual transfer of storage and distribution infrastructure to private control.

Together, these measures threaten to dismantle the last remaining safety net for farmers during price volatility and market shocks.

The government claims that reforms will create a “unified national market.” In practice, they are intended to create a corporate-controlled market. Without a legally enforceable MSP, farmers are left to the mercy of fluctuating prices and corporate purchasing power. The result is a system designed for profit extraction rather than public welfare.

Mumbai-based Janata Weekly [notes that](#) expenditure on procurement and price support has been slashed or merged into vague umbrella schemes, diluting their effectiveness, while funds for digitalisation and private-sector “innovation missions” have grown. [Janata Weekly](#) implies that the political economy is clear: the state’s role is being redefined from guarantor of livelihoods to broker for corporate investment.

If these plans succeed, it is likely that the end-result will be the weakening and eventual withdrawal of public institutions such as the Food Corporation of India and the Public Distribution System, thereby eroding one of the world’s largest food security networks (under the National Food Security Act, India’s food welfare programmes currently serve more than 800 million people, providing subsidised food to a significant portion of the population). The resulting vacuum would be filled by multinational supply

chains. The likely outcome, as [The Wire warns](#), is a future where India must rely on the same corporations that now dominate its agricultural policy to purchase its own staples.

In response, since early 2024, new waves of protests have erupted. The demands remain consistent: a legal guarantee for MSP, debt waivers and the repeal of corporate-friendly policies such as the NPFAM. The response has been familiar too in the form of detentions, tear gas, bulldozed encampments and internet shutdowns in protest zones. Social media accounts of union leaders and journalists have been taken down under official orders.

The ability to feed a population on its own terms is the foundation of national sovereignty. As the state retreats and global capital advances, India risks becoming dependent not only on imports but on the dictates of multinational supply chains that prioritise profit and control over nutrition and need.

The farmers protest 2020-2021 received massive global media coverage. The agitation led to the repeal of the farm laws, but it was a symbolic victory and did not change the underlying trajectory. Unless India ensures its food system serves the public good—grounded in food sovereignty and the protection of farmer rights—corporate capture will only deepen.

## Chapter 17

### India and the Agri-Cartel's 35-Year Siege

*Written in January 2026*

As the Indian Parliament moves into the February 2026 Budget Session, there is a sense of déjà vu in the country. While the world celebrated the repeal of the 2020 Farm Laws as a victory for farmers and their year-long protest, the underlying blueprint never left the table. It has simply been rebranded and digitised.

Today, the introduction of the Seeds Bill 2025—frequently called the 2026 Seed Act—completes a pincer movement that was first inked 35 years ago in the halls of the World Bank and the IMF.

The story begins in 1991. Facing a balance-of-payments crisis, India accepted a structural adjustment package that evolved into a massive cumulative debt through decades of servicing and conditional reform. Over three decades, this financial hook grew to more than \$120 billion in cumulative obligations. When adjusted for 2026 inflation in today's dollar terms, that commitment represents around \$286 billion.

The 'interest' has been the systematic dismantling of India's sovereign food systems through successive policy realignments to make way for global corporate players, steadily shifting the nation from a focus on food security to a dependency on cash-crop exports and expensive external inputs. These reforms have progressively aligned Indian agriculture with global trade, intellectual property and financial regimes.

Many of the long-term dynamics set in motion in 1991 are analysed in detail in *Food Dependency and Dispossession: Resisting the New World Order* (2022), which examines India's agrarian crisis, neoliberal 'reforms', and the 2020–21 farmers' protest (available as a free download [here](#)).

This 35-year plan has now entered its bio-digital phase. Two pieces of legislation are currently working in tandem to finalise the enclosure of India's farmers. First is the [National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing](#) (NPFAM), the sophisticated successor to the repealed farm laws.

It utilises ‘Digital Public Infrastructure’ and Silicon Valley ‘AgriStack’ to create a unified national market that effectively bypasses the regulatory protections of the traditional mandi system.

By declaring private warehouses as ‘deemed markets’ and linking farmer IDs to a centralised digital grid, the NPFAM would enable unprecedented price-setting power for global asset managers and Indian billionaires to monitor harvests and dictate prices before a single seed is even planted.

The second half of this pincer is the 2026 Seed Act. Scheduled for full implementation this year, it introduces mandatory registration and QR-code traceability for all commercial seeds. While the government claims the Act protects farmers’ rights to share ‘unbranded’ seeds, this is a hollow promise.

Under the NPFAM, only ‘certified’ and ‘traceable’ produce can enter the high-value digital value chains. This makes indigenous, unbranded seeds commercially invisible—relegating them to a subsistence-only bubble while corporate-patented hybrids take over. Furthermore, the Act introduces graded penalties that can reach ₹30 lakh (\$33,300) for administrative errors, a figure that would pose an existential risk for any small-scale seed-saving collective.

This predatory commercialisation was forged in Washington 35 years ago: a drive for monopolisation by a handful of global agribusiness giants and tech firms under the guise of ‘modernisation’.

Federal states like Punjab and Kerala now pass resolutions to reject the NPFAM and protect their own seed sovereignty, while others are being financially coerced or ‘incentivised’ to play along.

The forces of human displacement and dispossession are attempting to finalise a decades-long corporate hijack through debt, digital infrastructure and legislative control. The 1991 deal was the beginning. What began as a financial adjustment is now rapidly evolving into a total restructuring of India’s food sovereignty, agriculture and—given that around 64% still live in the countryside—society.

# Chapter 18

## Urban Mirage Built on Rural Ruin

*Written in December 2025*

India's development model is not development. It is [accumulation by dispossession](#). It replaces what farmer and writer Wendell Berry calls 'right livelihood' based on a harmony with natural cycles with a predatory industrialism.

Where agriculture was once a gift exchange with the earth, cultivating communal solidarity, it has been reduced to a systematic transfer of wealth, land and power from rural communities to corporate elites—a slow-motion process on a scale that borders on the apocalyptic.

This system is urban-centric and corporate-aligned and regards rural communities as expendable assets. The end-result is the erosion of rural self-sufficiency where agrarian communities are forced into precarity.

Industrial agriculture's obsession with 'yield' is a reductionist mindset. It mistakes the mass production of 'empty' calories for food security. In reality, agroecological systems offer far higher '[health per acre](#)', providing the essential micronutrients that industrial monocrops—bloated by synthetic nitrogen and thirsty for stolen (from local communities) groundwater—simply cannot deliver. [Consider that](#) it takes roughly 3,000 to 5,000 litres of water to produce 1kg of rice, compared to approximately 200-300 litres for millets.

A hectare of chemically grown, high-yield rice provides 'empty' calories (starch) but is increasingly nutritionally bankrupt. [Research from](#) the Indian Council of Agricultural Research shows that since the 1960s, the concentration of essential micronutrients like zinc and iron in wheat and rice has decreased by 30% to 45%. In contrast, an agroecological plot of millets and pulses provides significantly more iron, zinc and protein per square inch.

Corporate agribusiness with its promotion of industrial agriculture claims to be ‘feeding the world’ but have too often fed it empty calories while starving it of nutrients.

## **Urbanisation and Displacement**

Once traditional farming systems have been destabilised by a withdrawal of state support, corporate input regimes, global supply chains and monocultural production, farming [becomes](#) financially non-viable for many. Mass migration to cities is then an inevitability. It is forced displacement. [According to the World Bank](#), India’s urban population grew from 18% in 1960 to more than 36% in 2023.

By forcing people into cities, the system alienates them from the sources of true vitality: the soil and the seasons. Once removed from the land, the citizen is transformed into a consumer, trapped in the rituals of materialism, trying to purchase a sense of self.

Urbanisation forms part of a neoliberal policy framework (aligned with World Bank strategies) to move hundreds of millions of people from the land into cities while clearing the land for industrial-scale, corporate-run farming (see [here](#)).

However, drawing on the work of Wendell Berry and others, a deep-rooted ‘agrarian imagination’ can challenge this hegemony. It offers a profound critique of mainstream development and urges a reimagining of a more just future (see [here](#)).

The [agrarian imagination](#) involves recognising the knowledge, culture and ecological contributions of rural communities based on an alternative model that values local autonomy and ecological balance.

## **Resistance Through Practice**

We can see what this might look like by turning to a recent project in Odisha, where theory has been turned into practice. [The report \*Forgotten Foods for India’s Food Systems: Lessons from MSSRF Millet Scaling in Odisha\*](#) chronicles the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation’s (MSSRF) two-decade-long intervention (2002–2025) to revive millet cultivation and consumption in India.

It is a compelling case study of how agroecological methods and strong government policy can successfully address challenges faced by rural communities.

The report frames millets as a ‘forgotten food’ because their cultivation was marginalised by state policies that have favoured subsidised high-yielding rice and wheat whose nutritional values have fallen significantly since the 1960s. This shift has contributed to widespread micro-nutrient deficiencies.

Aside from the falling nutritional values, staples like millets, which are naturally superior in nutrients (iron, zinc etc.), were displaced. Millets [contain](#) 3–5 times more iron and calcium than polished rice or processed wheat. However, Since the Green Revolution (1960s), the area under millet cultivation in India has dropped [by roughly](#) 60%, replaced by rice and wheat.

The Odisha state government instituted a decentralised procurement system and dramatically raised the minimum support price (MSP) for millets, increasing it 11-fold. This guaranteed price was a powerful economic incentive, eliminating the risk for farmers.

To sustain the high MSP, the government created stable high-volume demand by integrating millets into all major welfare schemes, including the Public Distribution System, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Integrated Child Development Services. This delivered naturally nutritious food to millions of citizens while ensuring farmers’ financial security.

## **Empowering Women**

The success of the Odisha millet project serves as a powerful example of how rural communities can resist the pressures of the dominant development model. Strengthening local governance structures, like *panchayats* and farmer producer organisations (FPOs), offers a potential roadmap for empowering rural areas to take control of their resources and futures.

The MSSRF project successfully scaled from five villages to impacting 7,500 farmers across 196 villages. It showcases a pathway rooted in

agroecology, food sovereignty and public policy that serves ordinary people. The model is fundamentally about public control over the food supply.

The MSSRF report is a proof-of-concept for a public-interest food system and is highly scalable and adaptable for many other similar crops and a template for state-level food system transformation.

While the Odisha example is in part institutionally driven, the [Women's Collective \(WC\) of Tamil Nadu](#) is more movement-led' but is yet again living proof of another successful agrarian model based on the empowerment of women.

By establishing community seed banks, the collective has severed the corporate noose of dependency: instead of buying corporate seeds every year, the women use indigenous varieties, effectively de-linking themselves from the corporate supply chain.

The collective's focus on millets proves that traditional, rain-fed crops provide better nutrition per acre and require zero expensive chemical inputs, directly debunking the industry claim that high-tech interventions are the only way to achieve food security.

The women also practice 'family first' farming by prioritising growing diverse food for their own plates before selling anything to the market. Decisions are made in village-level *sangams* (collectives) based on ancestral knowledge and local weather patterns, not on algorithms owned by a multinational corporation.

### **Stopping the Heist**

However, such initiatives exist in the shadow of power. The suction mechanism of neoliberalism too often makes rural life a financial impossibility for many farmers, transforming independent stewards of the land into a reserve army of labour in the cities. Policies imposed from above are the silent evictors, clearing the land for corporate-run monocultures and pushing millions towards the urban periphery to serve the very system that dispossessed them.

Only by strengthening local governance structures, such as *panchayats*, co-operatives and FPOs, can we see a foundation for a more decentralised, participatory form of democracy begin to emerge.

In this respect, the successes in Odisha and Tamil Nadu are not anomalies; they are proof that the agrarian imagination is alive. This worldview rejects the utterances of corporate executives like Simon Wiebusch of Bayer, who equate development with the erasure of rural autonomy.

[To Bayer](#), rural India is ‘backward’ because it is not yet fully dependent on proprietary seeds and digital advisories. But these initiatives flip that script: development should be measured by the permanence of rural life—whether a community can sustain itself across generations without corporate dependency or forced migration to urban slums.

### **Rejecting Neoliberalism**

Grassroots successes like MSSRF exist in spite of the prevailing neoliberal framework. These successes and many other examples in India and from around the world are agricultural victories as much as they are acts of ideological defiance.

Here, we see public goods reclaimed, with water, seeds and soil health treated as commons and not commodities for corporate capture. We also see the state using its procurement power to guarantee a dignified living for those who feed the nation, insulating them from the ‘race to the bottom’ of global markets.

In effect, power shifts from the self-appointed ‘saviours’ in corporate boardrooms to the grass roots. It demonstrates that rural renewal is not nostalgia for the past but an active reclamation and recognises that a civilisation cannot survive if it destroys the land, the people who care for it and the knowledge systems that sustain life.

The question is no longer whether alternatives exist; they do and are thriving wherever communities are allowed to breathe. The real question is whether the forces of dispossession will be permitted to bury them.

## Chapter 19

# Corporate Welfare: The Global Scam of ‘Feeding the World’

*Written in January 2026*

Supermarket shelves have never been fuller, yet diets have become poorer. Across the world, food systems praised for their productivity now deliver an abundance of calories alongside widespread micronutrient deficiency, ecological collapse and rural precarity.

This is the outcome of an agricultural model that equates food security with yield and mass production with nourishment. Sustained by billions in subsidies, industrial agriculture increasingly resembles a welfare state for agribusiness and retail giants whose profits depend on public money.

### Nutritional decline

Corporate-driven industrial agriculture claims to feed the world but too often delivers empty calories while starving populations of nutrients. Consider that high-yield rice produces empty calories while becoming nutritionally impoverished. Since the 1960s, the concentration of zinc and iron in wheat and rice in India [has fallen](#) by 30 to 45%. In contrast, millets and pulses [deliver far higher](#) levels of protein, zinc and iron per square inch.

This is not unique to India: Rothamsted Research in the UK has evaluated the mineral concentration of archived wheat grain and soil samples from the Broadbalk Wheat Experiment. The experiment began in 1843, and their findings show significant decreasing trends in the concentrations of zinc, copper, iron and magnesium in wheat grain since the 1960s.

At the same time, nutritionally dense millet acreage in India has declined by 60% over the last seven decades. The [decline](#) is a result of structural shifts in Indian agriculture following the Green Revolution.

In the UK, the logic is similar, albeit expressed differently. Ultra-processed foods dominate, monocultures deplete soil and calories are abundant while nutrition is undermined. Obesity coexists with micronutrient

deficiencies; grass-fed livestock and diverse rotations have largely been replaced by input-intensive systems, while supermarkets dictate production priorities and shape farming.

Industry PR frequently attempts to justify its role by implying the world would starve without its seeds and chemicals. The industry justifies this claim through the enduring myth of the Green Revolution; a narrative Prof. Glenn Stone and others [have effectively debunked](#). The claim that industrial seeds ‘saved’ India from mass starvation, for instance, is less history than PR.

In reality, the Green Revolution represented a pivot towards input-intensive farming that displaced existing productivity gains in favour of a model that mandated dependency on proprietary seeds, chemical fertilisers and pesticides supplied by an increasingly concentrated global industry.

### **Displacement and precarity**

When traditional farming is destabilised through state withdrawal, corporate inputs, global supply chains and monocultures, it becomes financially unviable for many farmers. Rural communities are removed from the soil. In India, this displacement is leveraged as part of a broader neoliberal strategy, clearing land for industrial-scale corporate agriculture.

In rural Britain, young people leave for cities as rural life becomes economically untenable and villages lose schools, healthcare and transport. Meanwhile, farmers rely heavily on subsidies, rural development grants and agri-environment schemes.

These payments mainly stabilise industrial supply chains and supermarket profits. In the UK, more than [half of farm income](#) comes from subsidies rather than market sales and larger farms disproportionately capture payments. In effect, subsidies sustain monocultures and high-volume production for supermarkets.

UK subsidies like the Basic Payment Scheme and its successors provide a non-market floor for farm income. They therefore function as an [indirect subsidy](#) for retail giants. By covering the farmer’s basic survival costs, the taxpayer effectively lowers the break-even point for producers, allowing

supermarkets to use their purchasing power to negotiate farm-gate prices that are frequently below the actual cost of production.

So, the taxpayer pays to keep the farm viable, only for the supermarket to extract the resulting value through suppressed prices and high retail margins.

### **Mugging the public**

These national subsidy regimes are embedded within a transnational agricultural input economy dominated by a [small number](#) of food retail, agrochemical and seed corporations, including firms such as Bayer and Syngenta, which sell proprietary seeds and chemicals at prices the farmer [could not otherwise afford](#).

In the UK, publicly supported farm incomes stabilise demand for proprietary seeds, pesticides and fertilisers integrated into supermarket-led supply chains, ensuring predictable markets for input suppliers even as farm-gate prices are driven down.

The farmer is squeezed by both sides (inputs and retail), and although the mechanisms might differ per country, the underlying logic is consistent: the state absorbs risk while private firms profit from farmer dependence on proprietary inputs and chemically intensive production systems. We see a globally integrated system of public risk management for agribusiness.

While India still (however precariously) attempts to buffer the producer (through mechanisms like the Minimum Support Price for crop assurance and the Public Distribution System to stabilise consumer costs), the UK system has been fully utilised to de-risk the balance sheets of private giants.

The British public is being ‘mugged’ twice: once at the tax office and again at the checkout. At the same time, the state is subsidising a third ‘mugging’: a taxpayer-funded public health collapse. By bankrolling volume over nutrition, the government pays corporations to manufacture a health crisis, then taxes the public to treat the fallout. The taxpayer funds the hollow calories, the supermarket margins and the resulting chronic diseases whose cost falls on the NHS.

## Welfare scroungers

The media too often vilifies the poor (whether families in the UK or struggling farmers in India) for needing public support. However, the biggest ‘scroungers’ are not families supposedly ‘fiddling the system’ but the shareholders of retail and input corporations whose profit margins are underwritten by public money.

In the UK, the agricultural sector is ensnared in a subsidy trap that functions as a taxpayer-funded life-support system for corporate retail. While the annual farming budget has remained [largely stagnant](#) at £2.4 billion since 2007 (effectively a significant cut when adjusted for inflation) it remains the only thing standing between many British farmers and bankruptcy.

According to Defra’s 2024/25 statistics, these payments now account for 30% to 55% of farm business income. Without this public intervention, the majority of UK farms would operate at a net loss. This means that the current market price for food is a policy choice to protect the margins of retail giants such as Tesco, which [recently reported](#) an adjusted operating profit of £3.13 billion.

In India, every time a farmer scans their fingerprint to purchase a subsidised bag of fertiliser, they trigger a transfer of public funds to chemical manufacturers. According to policy analyst Devinder Sharma (in numerous articles in The Tribune newspaper), by fixing the retail price of urea while guaranteeing cost recovery, the government has created a low-risk environment for input-intensive agriculture.

The average Indian agricultural household earns just ₹10,218 (\$113) [per month](#), while chemical companies—[buffered by](#) ₹1.91 lakh crore (\$23 billion) in public funds—remain highly profitable.

Whether through the stagnant grants of the UK or the biometric pipelines of India, the state has become the ultimate guarantor of a high-input, high-cost agricultural model that would otherwise be commercially unsustainable for producers.

## **Towards a new system**

In the UK, breaking this model requires a structural dismantling of the ‘supermarket state’. A genuine transition would necessitate land reform that decouples land value from real estate [speculation](#) alongside a strengthened [retail code](#) that mandates a minimum producer share of the retail price, ensuring value is not siphoned off by shareholders before it leaves the farm gate.

The current predatory model is a conscious political choice. An alternative is required—one rooted in community resilience, ecological health and nutritional sufficiency rather than corporate extraction. This shift is already visible in fragments of resistance emerging in both India and the UK.

In India, the revival of [millet cultivation](#) in Odisha demonstrates how subsidies can be reclaimed for social justice. By linking minimum support prices (MSPs) to decentralised procurement and school meal programmes, the state has transformed millets from ‘forgotten foods’ into pillars of nutrition and soil health.

In the UK, community-supported agriculture, seed-saving networks and local co-operatives act as quiet secessions from the corporate supply chain. While inheritance tax and market consolidation threaten land access, these projects prioritise health per acre and local autonomy, ensuring that the value created by the soil remains within the community rather than being siphoned off to retail headquarters.

The path forward requires a fundamental decoupling of food from the logic of extraction. This means a transition from a state that subsidises shareholder dividends to one that invests in soil sovereignty, small-scale farming and the long-term health of its people.

