



ETC Group
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Who Owns Nature?

New report warns of corporate concentration, commodification of nature; highlights global resistance grounded in “Food Sovereignty”

ETC Group today releases a 48-page report, “*Who Owns Nature?*” on corporate concentration in commercial food, farming, health and the strategic push to commodify the planet’s remaining natural resources.

In a world where market research is becoming increasingly proprietary and pricey, ETC Group’s report names names, discloses market share and provides top 10 industry rankings up and down the corporate food chain. Not all the corporations identified in ETC Group’s new report are household names, but collectively they control a staggering share of the commercial products found on industrial farms, in our refrigerators and medicine cabinets.

An international advocacy organization based in Canada, ETC Group has been monitoring corporate power in the industrial life sciences for the past 30 years. The report reveals that:

- From thousands of seed companies and public breeding institutions three decades ago, 10 companies now control more than two-thirds of global proprietary seed sales
- From dozens of pesticide companies three decades ago, 10 now control almost 90% of agrochemical sales worldwide
- From almost 1,000 biotech start-ups 15 years ago, 10 companies now account for three-quarters of industry revenues
- The top 10 pharmaceutical companies control 55% of the global drug market

With collapsing systems – eco, climate, food and financial – as the backdrop, *Who Owns Nature?* warns that, with engineering of living organisms at the nano-scale (a.k.a. synthetic biology), industry is setting the stage for a corporate grab that extends to all of nature.

“About one-quarter of the world’s biomass has already been commodified,” explains ETC Group’s Pat Mooney. “With extreme genetic engineering, we’re seeing new corporate strategies to capture and commodify the three-quarters of the world’s biomass that has, until now, remained beyond the market economy.”

Advocates of synthetic biology – the creation of designer organisms built from synthetic

DNA – are promising a post-petroleum future where fuels, chemicals, drugs and other high-value products depend on biological manufacturing platforms fuelled by plant sugars. In the 21st century “sugar economy,” industrial production will be based on biological feedstocks (agricultural crops, grasses, forest residues, plant oils, algae, etc.) whose sugars are extracted, fermented and converted into high-value products. Synthetic microbes will become “living chemical factories” that require massive quantities of plant biomass. ETC Group warns that corporations are poised to appropriate and further commodify biological products and processes in every part of the globe – as well as destroy biodiversity, deplete soil and water and displace marginalized farmers.

ETC Group’s report highlights similarities between the current financial and food crises. “Corporate-controlled food systems, suffering from decades of deregulation, have resulted in a cornucopia of calamities making us sicker, fatter and more vulnerable,” says ETC’s Research Director Hope Shand. Ongoing food contamination scandals, the global obesity burden and ocean “dead zones” caused by fertilizer pollution are among the food chain disasters cited in *Who Owns Nature?* “Unhealthy and hazardous food products are constant reminders of a corporate food chain broken to bits,” adds Shand.

Governments are working hand-in-hand with corporations to deny the root causes of the crises and sidestep structural reforms. “Despite the implications for democracy and human rights, no international body exists to monitor global corporate activity and no UN body has the capacity to monitor and evaluate emerging technologies,” says ETC Group’s Kathy Jo Wetter. “The ongoing food emergency and imploding global economy testify to the need for monitoring and oversight of corporations, as well as social control of powerful new technologies.”

Who Owns Nature? reports on daunting trends in corporate concentration and technology convergence, but it also points to a very different reality and a powerful contrast to the corporate-controlled life sciences. Although a single company – Monsanto – accounts for almost one-quarter of proprietary seed sales, about three-quarters of the world’s farmers routinely save seed from their harvest and grow locally-bred varieties. Wal-Mart may be the world’s largest buyer and seller of retail food, but 85% of global food is consumed close to where it is grown – much of it outside the formal market system.

“There is vast and growing resistance to the dislocation and devastation caused by the agro-industrial food system,” points out Silvia Ribeiro of ETC Group. “In the global struggle for Food Sovereignty, the playing field isn’t level, but the scope of resistance is massive – peasant farmers, fisher people, pastoralists and allied civil society and social movements are fighting for locally controlled and socially just food and health systems.”

To download the full report: www.etcgroup.org

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ETC Group is an international civil society organization based in Ottawa, Canada. We conduct research, education and advocacy on issues related to the social and economic impacts of new technologies on marginalized peoples – especially in the global South. We look at issues from a human rights perspective but also address global governance and corporate concentration. All ETC Group publications are available free of charge on our website:

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