



Corporate Crops: Biotechnology, Agriculture, and the Struggle for Control

Gabriela Pechlaner

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Biotechnology crop production area increased from 1.7 million hectares to 148 million hectares worldwide between 1996 to 2010. While genetically modified food is a contentious issue, the debates are usually limited to health and environmental concerns, ignoring the broader questions of social control that arise when food production methods become corporate-owned intellectual property. Drawing on legal documents and dozens of interviews with farmers and other stakeholders, *Corporate Crops* covers four case studies based around litigation between biotechnology corporations and farmers. Pechlaner investigates the extent to which the proprietary aspects of biotechnologies—from patents on seeds to a plethora of new rules and contractual obligations associated with the technologies—are reorganizing crop production.

The lawsuits include patent infringement litigation launched by Monsanto against a Saskatchewan canola farmer who, in turn, claimed his crops had been involuntarily contaminated by the company's GM technology; a class action application by two Saskatchewan organic canola farmers launched against Monsanto and Aventis (later Bayer) for the loss of their organic market due to contamination with GMOs; and two cases in Mississippi in which Monsanto sued farmers for saving seeds containing its patented GM technology. Pechlaner argues that well-funded corporate lawyers have a decided advantage over independent farmers in the courts and in creating new forms of power and control in agricultural production. *Corporate Crops* demonstrates the effects of this intersection between the courts and the fields where profits, not just a food supply, are reaped.

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