



# THE RAM'S HORN

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NO. 71, APRIL 1990

## WHO GETS THE ASSISTANCE?

*Important*

At the end of March the Tory ministers who tend the interests of agribusiness (Mazankowski, Blais and Mayer) were at it again. This time they jointly announced, through AgCanada, that the "Federal government commits \$500 million in special assistance to farmers." The reason, according to the press release, was that thousands of farmers "face cash flow problems at a time of year when they need money to put in their crops." The big catch, however, is that this assistance is contingent on provincial matching with extra funds, that is, provincial funds not already allocated to assisting farmers. Up to their usual tricks, the Feds have made an offer that initially sounds good, but which is really designed to give them an excuse for doing nothing, or even better, aiding their corporate friends.

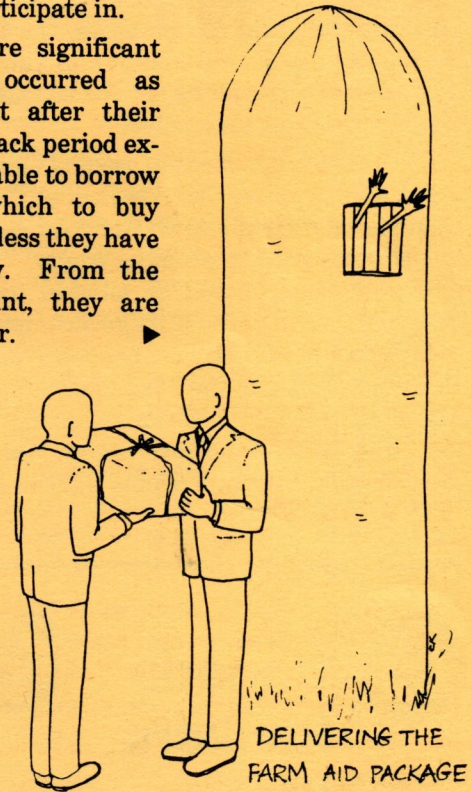
If this sounds too cynical, ask yourself who might actually end up receiving the assistance for spring planting: farmers? or the machinery companies, along with the transnational seed, chemical and fertilizer companies? (Can you name any that are not transnationals?) Or look at it this way: the transnational grain companies will look pretty silly if there is no grain planted this spring because farmers cannot obtain operating loans to put in a crop.

So the Canadian Wheat Board "will implement procedures under the Prairie Grain Advance Payments Act which should encourage creditors to extend needed operating credit to producers." (Remember that it was the Tories who last year changed the rules of that very game and announced that interest would be charged on such advance payments. The advance payment program was part of the whole Canadian Wheat Board program to ensure equity among farmers regardless of when they ship their grain.)

But the most interesting, and under-reported, feature of the Tory announcement was that "the flexibility of the Farm Debt Review Fund" would be increased, "for example, extending the lease-back arrangements so that farmers can stay on the land." Here again the announcement is phrased in such a way as to make it appear that it is the farmers who are to be aided. The reality, however, is that it is the equity of the Farm Credit Corporation and the banks that is being protected.

Everyone is well aware, by now, that the Farm Debt Review Boards were put in place not to help farmers but to protect and serve the interests of creditors, the banks in particular. This has been made clear by the numerous resignations from Farm Loan Boards across the country as members have realized the fraud they are being asked to participate in.

But the more significant realization has occurred as farmers find that after their three-year lease-back period expires, they are unable to borrow anything with which to buy back their land unless they have about 90% equity. From the farmers' standpoint, they are worse off than ever.



*Inside:*  
ACCOUNTING AND DECIDING WHAT COUNTS:  
VALUE, COMPENSATION, & PRIVATIZATION

But we must look at this from the banks' perspective, too. In fact, it may be the banks that have the real problem, according to the rules of the market economy. If the farmers are not able to buy back their land, what are the Banks and the FCC going to do with all the land they hold? They cannot farm it and if they put it on the open market now, when there are no buyers, land prices will sink out of sight and the banks will lose their equity. So in changing the rules of the game to allow farmers to continue to lease-back their land after the three-year period is up, the Tories are really getting the banks and the FCC off the hook, or, to put it more bluntly, saving them from their dearly-beloved Market! This also undercuts those of us who suggested that the banks and FCC might be willing to transfer land to land trusts as a way out of their predicament.

As usual, one needs to read the fine print to find out who is being used and who is being assisted.

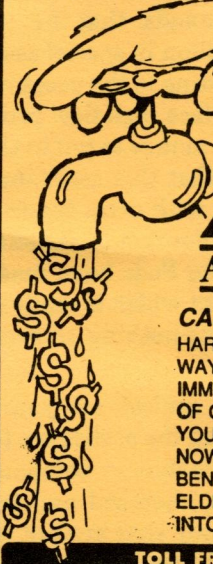
There is the occasional surprise: Graham Hedley, a career bureaucrat and Director of Planning and Analysis for Agriculture Canada, took on the Canada Grains Council, which is primarily a lobby group for the private grain trade. While the Grains Council was criticizing the government "for not moving fast enough to promote efficiency, deregulate the grain industry and expose farmers to the sometimes harsh realities of the marketplace," Hedley was telling them that "Canada has always struck a balance between efficiency and social justice." Hedley went on to say that issues like the relationship between farmers and rural communities, the efficiency of farms and the health of local communities and the preservation of a rural lifestyle all have to be addressed. (WP, 12/4/90) Hooray for Graham Hedley!

At the same meeting, several Grains Council members, among them Dick Dawson of Cargill, told Hedley that it's inefficient and wasteful for government to have policies designed to promote equity. "Natural competitive advantage should be allowed to rule." (Can you imagine Cargill without its government assistance? For a full account of this, see my book *Trading Up*, NC Press, 1990) According to the Manitoba Co-operator (12/4/90), the president of the Grains Council suggested that it would be better if the government just got out of agriculture "letting the grain people - the merchants - develop their own industry." □

## CORPORATE MOVES

The Canadian assets of Elders Grain (see *The Ram's Horn*, March 1990) were not on the market for long. Earlier this month Saskatchewan Wheat Pool announced that it would buy Elder's inland grain terminal at Moose Jaw, Sask., as well as two small terminals in Winnipeg that will continue to be used for specialty grains. Sask Pool will also get Elder's alfalfa dehydration and processing plant in Cranston, B.C., a seed cleaning plant in Kindersley, Sask., and three sunflower processing plants in North Dakota. (G&M, 9/4/90, WP, 12/4/90)

**TURN IT ON!**



**Elders**  
**AGRIBUSINESS**

**CASH FLOW... MAKE YOUR HARVEST PAY... THE ELDERS WAY! CASH ADVANCES, IMMEDIATE DELIVERY, AND OF COURSE THE BEST PRICES! YOU'VE GOT THE CROP IN... NOW REAP THE CASH BENEFITS OF CALLING ELDERS. WE'LL GET YOU INTO THE FLOW.**

**TOLL FREE CALLING**

Ad in *Western Producer*, 9/11/89

Or contact your nearest Elders Agent

Canada Packers, with sales in 1989 of \$3.3-billion and 12,000 employees, has been bought by Hillside Holdings, PLC, of Britain. Hillside is the conglomerate that bought Maple Leaf Mills from CP Enterprises three years ago and then sold Maple Leaf Mills grain division to Cargill early in 1988. Actually, Hillside is going to merge Canada Packers with Maple Leaf Mills and end up with 56% of the new company. Hillside will emerge as the largest food company in Canada and one of the largest in North America, with sales of about \$10.3-billion. In Britain, Hillside dominates the market in the "commodity food items" of poultry, eggs and meat. (G&M, 21/4/90) Now, who wants to guess what the future relationship between Cargill and Hillside/Canada Packers might be? □

 **Canada Packers Inc.**



**YORK**



# Accounting: for Land and Life

by Brewster Kneen

In the early 70s in Nova Scotia there were annual municipal sales of land on which the registered owners had not paid taxes. (I wonder how many readers of the Ram's Horn have ever acquired land this way?) Sometimes the taxes were unpaid because the owners had died and no one even knew they owned the land. In other cases, land was deliberately offered at a tax sale to clear title: ownership was deemed to be with the person paying the back taxes where there was a dispute over title. The point was to establish ownership (title) for the purpose of social order: paying taxes and establishing residency. Many areas of the country, rural Nova Scotia among them, were resettled after WW II through land grants in order to establish a tax base. Real estate taxes, in an era of subsistence agriculture, farming and fishing, were almost the only way of raising public funds; too many people had no taxable incomes.

The interesting aspect of this, looking back, is that it reflected a time in which land was not really a commodity. It was highly unlikely that one bought a piece of land for back taxes in order to make money by reselling it or "developing" it into building lots. Rather, a small woodlot could always provide some firewood, if accessible, or simply a place to hunt or hike. During the 70s, however, as capitalism advanced and real estate anywhere became an investment, tax sales went the way of the ring-down telephone.

On different occasions the Ram's Horn has tried to make our position on land ownership quite clear. Land is, in fact, not a commodity. It is a fixed quantity, while its *quality* can go up or down, depending largely on how human beings relate to it and treat it. It cannot be stored, like grain, or hoarded, although the *deeds* to land can be. Bidding up the price of land does not, and cannot, create more of it. Nor is it the owner who determines the price of land: that is done by society, either by default or intention. The "improvements" a landowner may make to a piece of land are in most cases not improvements to the land itself, but rather "services" like access roads, sewers, wells, drainage or electric power. In most cases, the land itself suffers from the building or imposition of these "services" and its real value is diminished, even though the price of the land for building lots might be enhanced.

Although a good view can add to the value of land, a good view cannot be created by a land owner. On the other hand, the ignorance and/or greed of developers can certainly destroy a good view and the social value of land,

to the detriment of both the public and the occupants of the land. This is not restricted to rural land; a prime example is the private development of the Harbourfront in Toronto which has limited public access to an enjoyment of the waterfront.

In other words, a landowner can benefit from an increase in the price of land - its commercial value - regardless of its real value. But this is not the only area in which we reward people for things they can take no credit for. Look at the C.E.O.s of major corporations and governments who get paid, or compensated, far more than their contributions to anyone or anything can ever be worth. For example, a recent newspaper article cited people like the chairman of Merrill Lynch who suffered a 28% pay cut, from \$2.8-million in 1988 to \$1.55-million in 1989. Meanwhile, at another brokerage, Morgan Stanley, the three top executives each "took home" about \$5.48-million apiece. (*G&M*, 14/4/90) These kinds of "income" figures are simply obscene, yet as a society we tend to cast our gaze not on the obscenities and greed of the wealthy: somehow they are supposed to be worthy of their pay, just as the senior people in Mulroney's government, and its crown corporations and bureaucracy, are supposed to be worth the \$150,000 or more that we pay them.

The scandal is that these are the very people who can say, like Fisheries Minister Valcourt (whose personal record is well known), that they are worried about the moral fibre and the "work ethic" of the East Coast fishers and plant workers, because they are getting unemployment insurance too easily, and particularly because they are job sharing. (He is actually quoted as having said that there is a generation of parents in Atlantic Canada "whose only legacy to society will have been exhibiting enough patience to qualify for unemployment insurance. What kind of work ethic are we giving our kids?") (*G&M* 20/4/90) Valcourt, and Mulroney, need not worry about UI or pensions or anything else: they will be able to gorge at the public trough the rest of their lives regardless of what they do or do not do. So why the double standard, one for the rich, another for the poor?

I simply cannot understand why the head of the post office should be "worth" six or ten times more than a rural postmistress. No community is held together by the head of Canada Post. In fact, in pursuit of corporate profit, he is destroying an essential public service.

The notion of public service, and public good, is essential if we are to get clear on the question of land own-

ership. The speculator contributes nothing of value to society, but on the contrary takes out far more than he puts in, like the banks do in the Third World. The developer often makes grand sums – far more than the sewers and roads he puts in are worth, particularly when the environmental destruction is costed in – for buying and holding land, and often renting it to farmers for many years on a yearly basis. There is no public service involved here, but if we look at the monetary rewards, it would seem that our society deems such activities to be a public good.

Curiously, the “value” created by real estate speculation, or the “development” of “raw land” into a subdivision, is reckoned into the Gross National Product – because it can be counted – while the cost of the environmental destruction of turning Class One farmland into building lots, parking lots, dumps, gravel pits and roads is neither calculated nor deducted. On the contrary, the cost of removing topsoil, filling wetlands, straightening creeks and putting them underground, is all considered a benefit, in dollars, to the national welfare. And the unpaid labour of those who raise children, keep gardens and maintain the social fabric of small communities is not counted as of economic value and does not show in the Gross National Product. The cost of farm labour is only included in the GNP when it is paid labour. The interest expropriated from farm income (the labour of others) and carted off to build more monuments to capital (bank towers) in the urban centres is counted, while soil loss and social isolation are not.

I was delighted recently to find an article in the magazine of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (*Technology Review*, January 1990) that discussed the total inadequacy of our accepted accounting practices. The article, titled *Wasting Assets*, by Robert Repetto, points out that the idea of a Gross National Product (GNP) was first published in 1942 – not very long ago. The idea of the GNP reflected the dominant Keynesian thinking of the time that regarded the aggregate categories of consumption, savings, investment and government expenditure as the really important things to measure. Now, however, we are beginning to recognize that “a nation could exhaust its mineral reserves, cut down its forests, erode its soils, pollute its aquifers, and hunt its wildlife to extinction – all without affecting measured income.”

Before the mid-1800’s, classical economists – and radical economists like Marx – regarded income as the return on three kinds of assets: natural resources, human resources, and invested capital – land, labour, and capital. However, accounting for natural resources has played little part in the neoclassical economics which developed, along with the industrial revolution and imperialism, in the latter half of the last century. “Neoclassical models concentrated almost exclusively on labour and

invested capital,” says Repetto. Land, along with forests, wildlife, minerals and water came to be regarded as of so little value as to be unworthy of accounting. His homely illustration is that when a person buys an apple pie at the supermarket, national income rises, while the pie that is made from apples picked off the tree in the yard and baked at home adds nothing to national income. But which pie is more “efficient” or economical? Or “sustainable”?

The ultimate absurdity and fundamental failure of neoclassical economics and accounting is that if I stay home and take care of my children, it is of no Value; if I go out and get a job, and hire a woman to come in and take care of them (possibly thus neglecting her own), both our wages are added to the GNP. The result could well be a net loss: I am no richer in terms of money; her children are less well off due to her time away working and my own children might well be better off were I home mothering/fathering them). There is a loss of benefit to the society as a whole, but the accounting says the exact opposite.

In other words, with the development of neoclassical economics we turned a collective blind eye to what happened to our community and our environment and its resources, including its ownership, and we thereby gave tacit, if not explicit, approval to the rape, pillage and exploitation of land, minerals, water, etc. We also attached little, if any value, to those lives which depended on those resources. The imperial conquest of Africa and South America clearly attached more value to the resources that could be shipped back to the heart of the empire than to the inhabitants of those lands. The choice for the native peoples was genocide or slavery – from the Beothuks of Newfoundland to the Kayapo of Amazonia.

Canada never had a revolution, and perhaps the attitudes and actions of our present government can best be understood if we consider that the current government of Canada is ‘led’ by colonial agents, though these agents now represent transnational capital rather than the Crown. There is a grand consistency in the policies of the present regime in Ottawa and its imperialist forebears: the natural resources are there to be exploited or traded away while the aboriginal peoples are treated with contempt. The most recent manifestation of this, of course, is the drastic cut-back in Federal support for native organizations and native communications.

We should keep in mind that aboriginal peoples everywhere hold a very non-market, anti-capitalist view of land tenure. Perhaps that is why they have been and continue to be so badly treated. ▶



## Multi-purpose tetracycline losing punch

Cox News Service Feb 21/90

Tetracycline, the second-most-used antibiotic in the world, is losing its effectiveness against common bacterial infections — and doctors are losing a broad-spectrum antibiotic that once was used to treat everything from bronchitis to venereal disease.

Growing bacterial resistance to the drug, which for 40 years was a first-line defence against respiratory, urinary and genital-tract infections, is making tetracycline the Model T of antibiotics.

"We no longer have a magic bullet," said Dr. Marilyn Roberts, a pathologist at the University of Washington, where studies show tetracycline-resistant bacteria even in women with no recent exposure to the drug.

Dr. Roberts says this means tetracycline may no longer be useful for the control of urogenital tract infections such as gonorrhoea and chancroid.

There are also reports in the United States and Britain that tetracycline will no longer kill the germs that cause meningitis. Tetracycline still works against many infections, including the organisms that cause Lyme arthritis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and *Chlamydia pneumoniae*, an acute upper-respiratory disease.

**This is what happens when a fly lands on your food. Flies can't eat solid food, so to soften it up they vomit on it. Then they stamp the vomit in until it's a liquid, usually stamping in a few germs for good measure. Then when it's good and runny they suck it all back again, probably dropping some excrement at the same time. And then, when they've finished eating, it's your turn.**



Cover food. Cover eating and drinking utensils. Cover dustbins.

*(Source unknown - a friend passed it on)*

**FOOD AND HEALTH ~**  
*Some novel (and seasonal) connections*

## Success is sweet with ancient remedy

E&M Apr 6 '90  
New York Times Service

To help heal seriously infected wounds, some surgeons have revived a 4,000-year-old treatment born on the battlefields of ancient Egypt: they pack the depths of treacherous wounds with sweet substances such as sugar.

Dressings made of sugar and honey, favored by healers throughout history, fell into disfavor with

the development of antibiotics more than half a century ago.

But even the most sophisticated modern preparations have proved unable at times to overcome the hearty bacteria that live in deep wounds, and a handful of doctors, mostly in Europe, are turning once again to sugar.

"It's a very old and very simple treatment that was forgotten for a while but is now coming back, like

a fashion," said Professor Rudy Siewert, chairman of the department of surgery at the Klinikum Rechts der Isar in Munich, West Germany.

Experts say the ancient treatment probably works because sugar tends to draw water into its gritty midst, through osmosis. This action both dries the bed of the wound to promote tissue growth and dehydrates the bacteria that cause infection, leaving them weak.

The Technology Review article previously cited illustrates the perversity of our accounting practices by citing the example of upland agriculture in Indonesia:

*Although upland crop yields have improved as farmers have used better seed and more fertilizers, the farm income that will be lost owing to the annual depreciation of soil fertility is about 4% of the value of crop production – equal to the annual production increase. In other words, in Indonesia's uplands, farm output is increasing at the expense of future output.*

Who really benefits from “the annual production increase”? As indicated above, the farmer may benefit a bit at the time, but only at the expense of future generations. The seed company and the fertilizer salesman probably benefit more than the farmer. So along with the issue of ownership and privatization, the question of compensation, and who pays for it in the long run, must be considered.

Just as a real estate developer is entitled to receive adequate compensation for the services he installs in a subdivision, and for the costs of designing and landscaping, so should someone who works with ideas or information be adequately compensated. But it is one thing to be adequately compensated for one's labour, including artistic and intellectual, and quite something else to claim exclusive ownership over the product of one's labour. For one thing, such exclusive claims overlook the role that others have played in the creative act and unduly emphasize the contribution of one actor in what is an historical dialectical process involving many actors. (For example, readers may note that my books are *copyright Brewster Kneen* – I was told I had no choice in the matter.)



This problem is highlighted in the issue of *Plant Breeders Rights*. In the face of pressures from the seed

industry and the industrialized countries of the north to extend plant breeders rights, there has been an organized resistance coming from a variety of international aid agencies in support of Third World farmers. This Third World perspective insists that genetic resources are being stolen from the keepers of genetic diversity by scientists from the North, who then want to claim exclusive ownership over this stolen property. The Third World advocates point out that the scientists and seed companies from the North do not simply “find” genetic resources in the South. What they “find” are the products of centuries, often, of selection and genetic adaptation, carried out by natural forces and Third World farmers. As a result, these Third World farmer advocates claim that genetic resources cannot morally be privatized by those who steal them; that existing genetic resources are the result of the labour of generations of farmers and gardeners; that this labour, and the value of its product, must be recognized in the valuation of the genetic resources. In other words, the creators of the seeds ought to be compensated in the same way as a writer or an artist or an inventor. This issue of compensation is not the same as the issue of ownership rights.

While the media, the government, the corporate sector and the agricultural establishment all seem to agree that every country except Canada already has Plant Breeders Rights, the fact is that there are only 18 member countries in UPOV, the Union for the Protection of Plant Varieties. All 18 are industrialized countries of the northern hemisphere, including Hungary and, most recently, Poland. Clearly there is extensive doubt about the value or morality of claiming exclusive ownership over plant varieties, regardless of the language of “protecting plant varieties”.

With recent developments in biotechnology and genetic engineering, it seems, the battle lines are becoming even more confused. Seedling, the newsletter of the Spain-based group Genetic Resources Action International, describes a recent meeting in Geneva between

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*from an article in New York Times, 3/4/90*

Among the Kayapo, said Dr. Posey, an “enormously wide range” of plants are brought from vast areas of forest and re-planted on small plots of three acres or less. Most have multiple uses as, for example, natural fertilizers and pesticides, insect repellants, building materials, medicines and food. “These islands are sort of supermarkets concentrated in specific places,” Dr. Posey said.

In creating the islands, he said, the Indians actively reshape the environment, transplanting forest species to the savanna in a sort of “mix-and-match” kind of ecological management.

Pharmaceutical companies have long exploited the medicinal properties of plants discovered from native cultures, said Dr. Posey, and the potential for broadening that exploitation into other areas is considerable.

In a study reported last year in the British journal *Nature*, Charles M. Peters of the Institute of Economic Botany, Alwyn H. Gentry of the Missouri Botanical Garden and Robert O. Mendelsohn of Yale University calculated that the long-term economic value of products taken from the living forest, excluding field crops that might be grown there, is about double that of the timber that might be har-

vested from it and the cattle that might be raised on cleared land.

Already, as awareness grows, Dr. Posey and many others are worrying about what might happen to the native peoples if the outside world begins tapping their intimate, detailed knowledge of the Amazonian environment in earnest. Will they expropriate the expertise, denying compensation to those who have developed it? That would be “nothing more than another form of neo-colonialism,” said Dr. Posey, who last week, in a sign of the times, attended an international conference on “intellectual property rights” in York, England.

UPOV and WIPO, the World Intellectual Property Organization, as an "interface between patent protection and plant breeders rights." The meeting, according to *Seedling*,

*focused on whether double protection (PBR and patents) should be allowed, whether the farmers' privilege should be maintained and whether/how breeders should pay for each others' materials. Heavily dominated by the industrial countries, the discussion disintegrated into perfect chaos when Barry Greengrass from UPOV initiated a discussion on how to define a plant variety: 1) for the purpose of excluding it from patent protection, and, 2) for the purpose of protecting it with PBR. Nobody even tried to come up with a definition for the purpose of agriculture ...*

In other words, if you aren't sure you know the real difference between a variety and a species, don't feel bad. Those who claim to know may only be trying to sell you something - like a "new" hybrid seed.

*Seedling* also reported on the current GATT negotiations in which the U.S.A. is stridently attacking Third World Countries for inadequate protection of intellectual property rights. The U.S. describes the lack of patent protection as a non-tariff trade barrier. The issue is referred to as TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property rights). Developing countries, on the other hand, want to know why they should be forced to adopt the U.S.'s intellectual property rights system which will only benefit foreign multinationals.

*As well, while the American Chamber of Commerce is circulating extravagant figures on the loss of business earnings due to lack of adequate patent protection abroad, the Third World is being asked to take responsibility for those losses and increase its net flow of revenue to the North. Through TRIPS, it has been argued, the North is basically demanding that the South subsidize the North's biotech and other industries.*

**The world's largest drug companies**

Company	Drug sales (\$bn)
Merck (US)	5.02
Bristol Myers/Squibb (US)	3.78
Glaxo (UK)	3.62
SmithKline Beecham (UK)	3.61
Ciba-Geigy (Switzerland)	2.91
Hoechst* (West Germany)	2.80
Takeda* (Japan)	2.43
American Home (US)	2.35
Pfizer* (US)	2.33
Sandoz* (Switzerland)	2.31
Eli Lilly* (US)	2.27

\* 1987 Revenues. Source *Financial Times*

*New Scientist* 18 November 1989

*Under India's leadership, the South is demanding its right to use intellectual property systems as a tool for national development rather than a tool for creating dependence on the North. But the fight in GATT is heavily controlled by the industrialized countries, which is the very reason why the US brought TRIPS to GATT in the first place. The Americans made it perfectly clear that there should be no exceptions as to what should be patentable, including life forms.*

As suggested earlier, intellectual property rights - patenting life forms - is really very similar to private ownership of land, even though the matter in question - land or DNA - is radically different. When the principle of private ownership of land attains the degree of sanctity that it has in North America, it is very difficult to put curbs on the uses and abuses that such privatization facilitates. Ask anyone involved in the struggles to stop a major developer, or a pulp company! By the same token, just try to limit the activities of the patent lawyers working for giant transnational corporations.

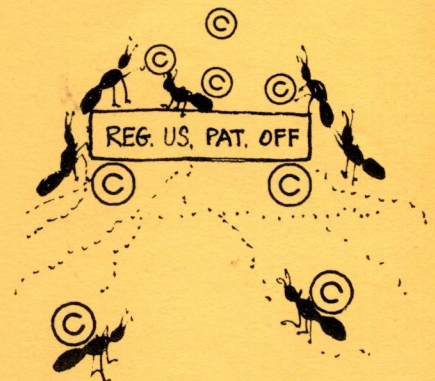
When there is no inherent or natural distinction, at the level of DNA, between mushrooms and humans, or mice, except for the configuration of the information encoded, then how does one argue rationally for limiting ▶

**WORLD'S TOP TEN SEED COMPANIES**  
(in millions of US dollars)

RANK	COMPANY	COUNTRY	SEEDS TURNOVER
1.	Pioneer Hi-Bred	U.S.A.	735
2.	Sandoz	Switzerland	507
3.	Limagrain	France	255
4.	ICI	U.K.	250
5.	Upjohn	U.S.A.	241
6.	Cargill	U.S.A.	230
7.	Dekalb-Pfizer	U.S.A.	174
8.	Takii	Japan	160
9.	Ciba-Geigy	Switzerland	150
10.	Sakata	Japan	145

NOTE: Royal Dutch Shell, with an estimated seed turnover of US\$ 200 million was left out of this table as the company recently offered its seed interests for sale.

SOURCE: *Le Monde*, Paris, 21 Nov. 1989, based on ICI Estimates. Adapted by GRAIN.



the patenting of the expression of that information, i.e., life forms? In other words, either Intellectual Property Rights are a good thing or they are evil. There is simply no middle ground in material reality. You either accept the principle or you do not, and if you do, then you have to be prepared to accept the patenting of any and all genetic material, including your own.

Before one gets to such an extreme, however, it is good to be reminded of what is at stake, even at the level of seeds alone. The world's top ten seed companies (*see table*) take in some \$3-billion out of an estimated total world commercial seed market of \$17-billion.

The most recent issue of *Seedling* also reported on an international meeting in India of some 50 people from seed banks, public research institutes, corporations (such as Ciba-Geigy and Pioneer Hi-Bred), UN agencies and aid and development NGOs. Compared to the first such meeting in 1988, according to *Seedling*, the practical and ideological lines were considerably less well defined in the 1990 meeting and there was a surprisingly strong consensus on concerns about the implications of intellectual property rights applied to plants:

*In the field of intellectual property rights systems, the Keystone Dialogue consensus came forward with some remarkably strong language on their consequences for genetic resources conservation and utilization. For many years, NGOs have been pointing to the negative impacts that IPR systems such as plant breeders' rights and patents have on genetic diversity and plant breeding. For the same number of years, official circles and representatives from seed companies vigorously denied such impacts. Now . . . this impressive gathering of government*

*administrators, corporate representatives and NGO folk all agreed that "at the level of individual plant species of agronomic value, current IPR systems reinforce the tendency of plant breeding to decrease genetic diversity." They also agreed that "the existing IPR systems are not generally considered useful in developing countries." The Keystone Dialogue (named after the U.S. foundation paying the bill) also expressed its deep concern about the current GATT negotiations on TRIPS. They felt that if the GATT deal includes the patenting of genetic resources, it will seriously clash with all international initiatives on genetic conservation, many of which start from the fundamental principle of genetic resources being "the common heritage" of mankind.*

This is where the issue of land tenure and life patenting come together, confronting us with issues that we have long sought to avoid. Microbiology and capitalist accumulation of wealth and power demand a more considerate response than the assertion of the so-called rights of private property.

[*Seedling*, bi-monthly, 16 pages in English, is available from GRAIN (Genetic Resources Action International), Apartado 23398, E-08080 Barcelona, Spain] □

*Current interest rates charged by the Farm Credit Corporation as of April 13:*

14.125% for 5-year fixed rate mortgage  
13.25% for 15-year " " "  
14.75% for shared-risk mortgage

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