



The Last Word: HERE WE GO AGAIN!

Award winning garden designer David Keegan works from a dedicated design studio in Manchester on commissions for both private and commercial clients. This month he discusses the subject of genetically modified crops.

Do you ever hear about something and catch yourself thinking ‘here we go again’? You know it’s funny but as an avid reader of business newspapers, financial reports and watcher of property porn on the telly, I seem to recall many voices clearly stating that we would never see a property slump like the one we experienced in the late 1980s. I wonder where they are now? Heads well below the parapet I’ll bet!

It now looks certain that we are heading into a very rocky period of uncertainty. That does not mean however, that no one will be making money. Along with the losers there will of course be those who will recognise this moment of weakness as the perfect opportunity for a little bit of keen manipulation.

One of those opportunities, which in my view has a very ugly head, is genetically modified foods. Genetic modification (GM) you think? But wasn’t that seen off with a very definite NO, NO, NO a couple of years ago?

Considering the majority of the British public is opposed to GM, I wonder which part of NO both the biotech and our government does not understand? Well no. Like any good hunter it has been lurking away in the background waiting for its moment to pounce. And pounce it will if we are not vigilant.

GM foods represent big money and big biotech companies now don the face of compassionate carers for the poor of the world and the argument of food shortages. This would seem to fly in the face of the United Nations who claims that we already produce enough food to feed the world.

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for food and organic farming and produce became a boom market. However, with everyone now tightening their collective belts we are all suddenly in search of a bargain which involves food as much as anything else.

So far, our food supplies have suffered from the manipulation of supermarket chains that have slowly squeezed out local stores, small town high streets and farmers. Look at own label supermarket produce and you will find most of it is produced on supermarket super farms.

I see a global trend here where all our essential commodities end up in the control of a very few companies with their eyes very firmly fixed on the bottom line to the detriment of the consumer. GM is its stereophonic second speaker.

With more and more agricultural land given over to growing bio-fuels is it any wonder we may face food shortages? GM is not the answer as it will only create another layer of dependency, not to mention the environmental impact. The danger now is that GM will be forced upon us through the European Union bowing to pressure from the United States who are in cahoots with the likes of Monsanto and other multinational biotech companies.

Let’s be very clear what GM is: it is the manipulation of plant and animal genes from one unrelated form to another in order to create a hybrid. The reality is that we don’t know what the long term consequences are because it has not been around long enough.

Crops are genetically engineered to have resistance to a particular herbicide, or in plain English, the ‘poisons’ which are sprayed onto our food. This particular herbicide is one that is only produced by the biotech. I think you could refer to this rather glibly as capturing the market? The problem is that once this Frankenstein is out of the cage and released into the wild, there is no mechanism for its recall back into the laboratory for adjustment. To use a supermarket slogan, ‘Once it’s gone, it’s gone’!

With GM there will be no second chances.

The reality is GM crops have already had disastrous consequences for countries where their use has been permitted. In Australia, tests on GM peas have been abandoned after apparently causing bizarre allergies in mice.

I would question whether we can trust our politicians to do the right thing when one of its biggest donors and a former science minister, Lord Sainsbury, is a major shareholder in Monsanto.

If we are to learn any lessons from climate change we are going to have to take a far more holistic approach to how we manage our environment. Those who brought about the industrial revolution will not have considered its consequences. The effects have taken around 120 years to be realised and it will take even longer to fully comprehend. Judged in this time frame, GM is in its infancy and the truth is that we still don’t know its potential consequences. Is it a risk we really want to take? ■



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