



Memo n°20: MIGUEL LOVERA

Agronomist, Paraguay

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Miguel Lovera is an agronomist who dedicated his career to *in situ* plant conservation through a diverse set of activities ranging from scientific and technical research, policy and advocacy, activism and civil service. The main focus of his work is the understanding of the interface of science and policy.

He is Technical Adviser to the Center for Research on Rural Law and Agrarian Reform of the Catholic University of Asuncion CEIDRA (acronym in Spanish). Providing technical advise to different rural development projects implemented by Catholic University programs.

Between April 2010 and June 2012, Miguel Lovera was President of the National Seed and Phytosanitary Service of Paraguay - SENAPE (in Spanish). Responsible for the overall management of the national seed and phytosanitary service, an institution with a staff of 600 and an annual budget of around US\$ 30 million. Member of cabinet of the Government of President Fernando Lugo.

In 2009-2010, Miguel Lovera was Chief negotiator on climate change of the Paraguayan Government. Responsible for formulation of the National Climate Change Policy of Paraguay. Chaired several UNFCCC contact groups.

Monsanto's interference in the economy and politics of Paraguay

Asuncion, September 25, 2016

My name is Miguel Lovera, I'm an agronomist and have served in the Cabinet of the President of Paraguay, Fernando Lugo, President of the Paraguay National Agricultural Service (SENAVE) between April 20, 2010 and June 22 2012.

SENAVE is an autonomous body whose mission and function is to ensure the quality and safety of food production and seeds in Paraguay. The interference by the defendant in the economy and politics is wide-ranging and damaging. Starting with the proposal, at the dawn of the new century, the Union of Production Guilds (UGP) was created, a front of "public relations" made up by suppliers of technology and inputs for agribusiness, collectors and exporters of agricultural products and large production cooperatives dedicated to extensive monoculture export crops, mainly GM soybean, corn, rice, sugar cane and sunflowers. It also includes the Rural Association of Paraguay (ARP), the union of the traditional landowning oligarchy.

Since the beginning of its existence, the main mission of the UGP was to prevent the government from exercising control or any regulation on the activities of its members, trying everything to "convince" the authorities not to interfere in the activities of agribusiness, giving bribes to the officials in office and inappropriate gifts.

The very act of intruding and being the very creator of an entity like the UGP shows us what kind of company we are dealing with. A company that needs a "deregulated" space to "undertake" their business activities. What I saw and still see, is a company that needs impunity to commit the atrocities it does in a territory where it enjoys such impunity, by joining the corrupt oligarchic sectors and corrupting government officials of all levels needed in their activity.

Since the beginning of my tenure at SENAVE, Monsanto, through the UGP, has tried to remove me from office. The PMU has directly addressed President of the Republic to have me removed. As this failed, they began a personal smear campaign against me with countless articles written against my colleagues and me.

The first disagreement we had with Monsanto was the decision not to register GM varieties of other species other than soybean (*Glycine max*), since, in my opinion, the

introduction of GM corn and cotton, the main items required by the agribusiness giant, presented serious risks to national agriculture. The reaction of agribusiness, through the UGP, was the indiscriminate and illegal planting of Monsanto GM corn varieties, smuggled into the country, with the warning that we dare not touch them. We replied to this reckless strategy by applying the law, which empowered me to order the destruction of illegal crops, according to the rules. These events represent, without doubt, Monsanto's declaration of war against the Paraguayan government.

Disagreements continued when my team and I questioned the so-called "Monsanto tax". This is a tax paid on all soybeans in Paraguay when they are exported, but it is not an official tax: it is collected on behalf of Monsanto by soybean collectors and delivered to the company.

The reason that such a tax was levied was for the "use of technology" that was GM. Since most farmers planted their own seeds year after year, Monsanto, with its power of "persuasion" backed up by the PMU, convinced the government that it was "reasonable". So reasonable was the measure that it soon became impossible to produce and export organic or conventional soybean in the country, due to the high costs incurred. We failed to convince the rest of the Cabinet of Ministers and the motions to remove such an abhorrent tax were unsuccessful.

In mid-2010, my administration submitted to the President of the Republic the Regulation of Law 3,742 / 09, known as the "Pesticides Act." Pressure from the PMU on the Executive was such that we decided to issue a resolution regulating the Act.

Thus, we enacted Resolution 1,160 in order to regulate many, but not all, of the items contained in the 3742 Act. The most irritating aspect for multinational and national producer companies and dealers of pesticides was the fact that the approval of new products would be based on the evaluation of their safety for humans and the environment, with the participation of the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Health as peers in the evaluation process. In this way, it left behind the obsolete tradition of relying on LD50 and the opinions of the Ministry of Agriculture to approve the use and marketing of pesticides.

Resolution 1160 also meant that the user of these substances would announce, by reliable means, if, when and how much product was used. This was too much for Monsanto and other related companies who touted the safety of the pesticides they sold.

The pressure exerted by Monsanto in the latter part of Lugo government's had one main objective: to register, at any price, GM seeds for marketing in the country.

At that time, only a few varieties of GM soybeans were registered and transnationals wished to introduce GM cotton seeds without complying with the requirements for the endorsement of the Ministry of Health and the Environment Secretariat, members of the National Biosecurity Commission for Agriculture and Forestry, CONBIO, whose opinion must be favourable to be registered on the SENAVE National Plant Registry.

After the coup, on August 21, 2012, the de facto president Federico Franco, by decree (a totally illegal procedure) authorised the commercial use of two GM varieties of cotton, BT and BT RR, ignoring the powers of CONBIO.

The following year, cotton production fell by 50%, with the collection of only 40,000 tons, after three previous harvests where the textile was recovering rapidly thanks to seed programmes and Lugo's government investment.

The following year, the cotton crop was already inconsequential, almost negligible, and in 2014 it virtually disappeared from crop fields, except in Chaco, where the Mennonites settlers have grown cotton for decades to use their own cotton ginning industry.

At present, encouraged by the improvement in international prices, the government of Horacio Cartes, the main beneficiary of the 2012 coup, aims to relaunch cotton production. But there is now no seed, due to the acute disappointment of producers because of the catastrophic drop in crop yields with Monsanto varieties in Paraguay.

In that same month of August 2012, the Franco government also approved the first commercial use of a variety of GM corn, VT Triple Pro, also from Monsanto. Other varieties of GMO corn were authorised successively, which can contaminate the seeds of native plants as a result of cross-pollination and, today, there is very high risk of contamination of these native seeds, grown ancestrally by the Guarani Indians, before even the incursion of the Spanish conquistadors.

The latest development is that Monsanto has introduced GM wheat seeds from Argentina for commercial use without the authorization of SENAVE, but guaranteed by the IPTA, the state agricultural research institution.

All the control over agribusiness and marketing companies like Monsanto pesticides came to an end with the overthrowing of President Fernando Lugo on 22 June 2012. A traumatic event for a people who had seen nothing but improvements since the Paraguayan War, which concluded in 1870. The representatives of the people clearly did not act in their interests, as they were the main losers of the coup, with the ending of development programs and social programs which benefiting the great majority. However, it is very easy to identify the main beneficiaries of this cruel shaking of the institutions. It is very easy to see that Monsanto obtained the approval for the seeds it could not impose upon the Government of Lugo. It is very plausible to suggest that such benefits were payment for their support and participation in the coup of June 2012.