

# 1 The crisis in world agriculture

## 1.1 Introduction

This article is ostensibly about a specific crisis in world agriculture, that of wheat rust, taken as a typical example, and how a technological fix, provided mainly by the information-rich North with its scientific infrastructure, has been used by the world community acting together to provide a temporary solution to prevent a major failure of the wheat crop and famine.

It is my contention that we must look deeper at a raft of underlying trends and maladies in our world civilization that have led to this crisis, in more detail, concerning

- The imposition and transfer of technology and assumptions taken from Northern mechanised monoculture, fertiliser, herbicides, seeds and growing techniques to a large number of poor and undereducated farmers in these methods in the South.
- The unsustainable use of planetary resources involved in adopting a high-energy agriculture worldwide.
- The enormous energy inefficiencies in global transportation to satisfy Northern markets, and its climate-change consequences.
- The structure of ownership of land.
- The relevance or not of permaculture, and its resources, capital and influence at the world level, which is not correspondingly comparable with forms of agriculture imposed and as advised by the North.
- The equivalence or not in terms of nutritional value of permaculture food compared with food obtained by intensive monoculture.
- The path of developments, for which the wheat rust crisis is an example, in adopting genetic modification as a solution to world food problems, and the inadequacy of proper testing of toxic effects, even under an enlightened regulatory regime, which is often not present, given the urgent time-frame of response to a continually developing emergency.
- The geopolitical aspect of GM food, and the relevance of EU restrictions on its development, which has delayed, but if these political obstructions were removed, would leave an open door to, the incorporation of GM food as an irreversible and universal development in world agriculture.
- The population crisis, so that whereas in the North population has almost stabilized, in the South the absence of education of an adequate standard, often of proper health care or of Northern levels of social security, has meant that large families are seen as a method of keeping secure in sickness and old age, and of providing labour, so that incentives to reduce overpopulation are largely absent because of social reasons.

Northern agribusiness and the world political system do not support or sometimes do not recognise the relevance and urgency of these measures at the world level.