

Monoculture

Concept: Monoculture

Author: Julietta Singh , University of Minnesota

Date Entered: 2005-05-05

Description Literally meaning "one culture," the term monoculture is used widely in globalization discourses to describe a commonly used method of crop cultivation. Monocultural production refers to a single-crop production method wherein all other existing or potential crops are excluded. Such practices are used both in small and large-scale farming operations across the globe.

This method of production is amongst the most contested of farming practices today. Many global environmentalists dispute the use of monocultures, arguing that a lack of diversity inherent to this mode of production has serious repercussions for soil fertility, local climates, and the consumption practices of both humans and animals. At the crux of the issue is the widespread use of environmentally destructive chemical products in this mode of production, bringing to the forefront a conflict between the private property rights of landholders and the rights of the populace to a clean environment and to sustainable use of lands.



(Photo: Stephanie Colvey, IDRC-CRDI)

One of the most vocal critiques of the widespread use of monocultures comes from the organic agricultural movement. Developed in the 1920s in

Europe and North America, this movement emerged as a response to the growth and expansion of monocultural practices. The movement champions polycultural land practices and the use of sustainable methods for soil fertility and pest control, and rejects technologies such as genetic engineering.

Because genetically engineered "miracle" seeds and heavy chemical use in monocultural production has been developed and exported by the West, substantial focus is now being placed on the impact that this practice is having upon non-Western regions. In her book *Monocultures of the Mind* (1993), Indian scientist and activist Vandana Shiva expresses deep scientific and socio-cultural concerns about the vast consequences that monocultures have upon ecosystems and human communities. Many contemporary critics such as Shiva regard monocultures not simply as production practices, but as ideological frameworks wherein humans come to reject — and finally to forget about — the earth's fundamental need for biodiversity.

Unsurprisingly, in Third World regions where communities have a more direct relationship to food production, the effects of monocultural production on the environment and the social landscape are more striking and immediately apparent. Activists, scientists, and community members in various developing regions are protesting the myriad ways in which the importation of chemically based monocultures into Third World territories is dramatically altering communities that have for centuries relied upon diversity as a necessity for survival.