

Soybeans and power: genetically modified crops, environmental politics, and social movements in Argentina

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Abstrak

Genetically modified (GM) or transgenic crops transformed global agriculture since their commercial release in the mid-1990s. GM crops are the product of genetically engineered seeds that are resistant to herbicides and insects. The United States, Canada, Brazil, and Argentina account for 80% of the global area planted with GM crops. Based on a decade of research (2003-2013), this book investigates the ways in which peasants and rural populations resist but also negotiate the socioenvironmental consequences of GM soybeans in Argentina. The Argentine government authorized the use of GM, herbicide-resistant soybean seeds in 1996 in the midst of a profound process of neoliberalization. By the mid-2000s, GM soybeans were cultivated on half of the arable land in Argentina. While this agricultural boom has benefitted agribusiness companies, it also has accelerated the deforestation of native forests, prompted the eviction of indigenous and peasant families, and spurred episodes of agrochemical exposure. *Soybeans and Power* offers three insights. First, it inspects the consequences of GM crops in concrete rural spaces. Through ethnographic research, the book grounds abstract debates about GM crops in concrete experiences of peasants and rural populations, those bearing witness to their expansion. Second, it scrutinizes processes of demobilization and the decline of contention, which are much less understood than the mobilization and the emergence of social movements. Third, it draws on the case of Argentina, a major global player in transgenic agriculture, shedding light on the social and environmental impacts of the recent commodity boom in Latin America.