

Oregon teacher: Anti-GMO activist Vandana Shiva talk slippery on facts

[Editor's note: On November 21, 2016, prominent GMO critic Vandana Shiva gave a presentation titled Soil not Oil at the Peace Center at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon. [You can read the GLP profile on Shiva here.](#)]

The promise of our Brave New “Information Age” is being seriously compromised. As sensational, profitable clickbait spreads like online wildfire, a new skill set is emerging needed to separate fact from fiction. In this effort, I rely on our educational institutions to help me understand the problems we face today with solid evidence and sound reasoning.

As a teacher and an activist, I am troubled that Vandana Shiva was promoted this week at our local community college by a campus “Peace Center.” My own university training is in music and political science, not biology and chemistry. So when I first heard Shiva’s claims some years ago, I was compelled to fact-check her questionable statements with those who are far more expertly trained in the matter at

VANDANA SHIVA
SOIL NOT OIL

Scientist, philosopher, feminist, author, environmentalist, activist, Dr. Vandana Shiva is a one-woman movement for peace, sustainability and social justice.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2016
Lane Community College Main Campus
Performing Arts, Building 6, 6-7:30 pm
Doors open at 5 pm

The event is live streamed and is free and open to the public.

To request accommodations that will facilitate your full participation in this event contact the Center for Accessible Resources at least one week in advance at (541) 463-5150 or accessibleresources@lanecc.edu

Peace Center
Lane Community College

Live Streaming and information at:
www.lanecce.edu/peacecenter

Shiva advertises herself as a

scientist, but this is not the case. Her degree is in philosophy, which even then might lead one to believe that her positions would be founded on the highest caliber of critical thinking, but that is not what I have observed. To the contrary, Shiva consistently makes assertions that fail even the most superficial tests of intellectual and ethical rigor.

For instance, Shiva has proclaimed that “[fertilizer should never have been allowed in agriculture... it's a weapon of mass destruction.](#)” Such an outrageous blanket statement would fly in the face of the daily

experience of practically every farmer from the Fertile Crescent onward. The more scientific application of fertilizer was one of the inputs that allowed the “Green Revolution” to provide greater food security for more than a billion people.

Even less tenable is her view of the introduction of “terminator technology” into seeds, devised in the 1990s (but never developed or released) as a kind of fail-safe to prevent horizontal gene transfer into open-pollinated crops. Ironically, this trait—which was developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture—would have addressed one of the primary (hypothetical) concerns of the anti-biotechnology activists. Yet Dr. Shiva protested it, writing “the possibility that the Terminator may spread to surrounding food crops or to the natural environment **MUST** be taken seriously.” The notion that sterile seeds would



their sterility is, quite frankly, preposterous to any attentive student of the most

Also troubling to me, as an advocate of environmental and social justice, are the

many ways in which Dr. Shiva’s unscientific platform actually runs counter to her own exhortation for better lives, better soil, less oil, and fewer pesticides:

- Shiva would end use of a genetically engineered eggplant (which contains a gene(s) from the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* that produces a protein toxic to certain agricultural insect pests) that is [helping farmers in Bangladesh rise from poverty](#). It saves them money because they no longer need 80 sprays per season of dangerous insecticides that are common in the developing world.
- Shiva would deny “Golden Rice,” which has been modified to produce the precursor of Vitamin A as a proven way to deliver therapeutic amounts of Vitamin A to the [half million children who go blind every year from Vitamin A Deficiency \(VAD\)](#), half of whom will die within twelve months thereafter.
- Shiva would deny African farmers the [drought-resistant strains of maize](#) and other crops that will be necessary for their prosperity and survival as global warming continues.

- Shiva would deny American farmers the ability to [save huge amounts of fossil fuel expenditures, soil erosion, and water pollution](#) by way of the “no-till” practices made possible by glyphosate-tolerant crops designed to withstand an herbicide that is [less toxic than both salt and caffeine](#).

I would hope this to be enough to give activist organizations pause. Yet, consider some other implications of Shiva’s positions:

- Shiva has long [attempted to turn the tragedy of farmer suicides in India into political fodder](#) by blaming them on the introduction of genetically engineered cotton. The uptick in suicides she is referring to has consistently and convincingly been [shown to be a result of economic factors](#), and it began well before its introduction. Yet Shiva continues to exploit others’ grim reality in this false narrative. That she would seek to capitalize on so many families’ misery in order to prop up her own misguided worldview is deplorable.
- Shiva has this to say about the hard-working people putting food on our tables every day: “[Saying farmers should be free to grow GMOs which can contaminate organic farms is like saying rapists should have the freedom to rape](#).” To my knowledge, she has never retracted or apologized for this patently offensive soundbite.
- Shiva promoted the “[Monsanto Collaborators](#)” website, featured by Mike “The Health Ranger” Adams for his detestable “Natural News” website. It compared modern agriculture to the genocide against Jews and was replete with Nazi and Holocaust imagery throughout. It was accompanied by an actual hit list of those he considered to meet the criteria deeming them as worthy of assassination, including public scientists and neutral journalists. The site was posted on Shiva’s “Seed Freedom” page on July 25th, 2014. In response to an immediate and unequivocal backlash, it was removed four days later.

The organization which hosted Shiva’s visit to my community describes its mission as “...*founded on the understanding that peace is rooted in social, economic, political, racial and environmental justice*.” I hope they will carefully consider whether or not Vandana Shiva’s own statements, positions and approaches to her activism live up to such honorable and particularly timely aspirations.

Scotty Perey is a music teacher, theater coach, and social activist living in Eugene Oregon, and tends to respect microbiologists’ views on microbiology and farmers’ views on farming as much as he would hope they would respect his views on piano and guitar theory. Follow him on twitter @scotty_p_music