Charles de Gaulle's influence on contemporary French culture and on France's rejection of genetically modified food

Susanna Lenore Foxworthy
Butler University

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Applicant: Susanna Foxworthy

Thesis title: Charles de Gaulle's influence on contemporary French culture and on France's rejection of genetically modified food

Intended date of commencement: May 13, 2009

Read, approved, and signed by:

Thesis adviser(s): Larry Riggs

Reader(s): Eloise Sureau

Certified by: [Signature]
Director, Honors Program

Level of Honors conferred: University Summa Cum Laude, High Honors in French, High Honors in Journalism
Charles de Gaulle's influence on contemporary French culture and on France's rejection of genetically modified food

A Thesis
Presented to the Department of Modern Languages
College of Liberal Arts and Science
&
The Honors Program
of
Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Susanna Lenore Foxworthy
April 24, 2009
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Introduction

In 1999, a farmer from southern France dismantled a McDonald’s in a symbolic display of his resistance to the American fast food corporation. His action was in response to a threat by the United States to impose a 100 percent import surtax on Roquefort cheese produced in France if the French refused to import American beef injected with hormones, specifically the bovine growth hormone or rBGH. France and the United States have a long history of disagreeing over issues, most recently the war in Iraq and the current conflict between Israel and the Gaza strip. In the 1990s, France, along with the European Union, resisted accepting genetically modified food into their countries. This resulted in regulation of the growth, import, and consumption of genetically modified crops and derivatives in the European Union from 1990 (Livermore, 2003).

There is ample research that proves France’s distrust and rejection of genetically modified (GM) food. In 2002, a survey consisting of 16,000 interviews from five EU nations revealed that less than half, 49 percent, of French people felt that biotechnology would improve their way of life within the next 20 years. Fifty-one percent of citizens believed that GM food was risky, and only 19.5 percent thought that GM food should be encouraged (Olofsson et al., 2006). Many scholars propose hypotheses as to why the French are so resistant to genetically modified food, including that the French distrust
institutions, they live in closer proximity to farms, and that they view genetically modified food as an American capitalistic creation.

Although in most studies, European ideas about genetically modified food are generalized to the continent, there are cultural influences within each country that affect its disapproval of the technology. To better understand these differences, it is essential to recognize that each European country has a unique history forging a distinct array of varied beliefs that affect policy building. France’s position as the leading exporter of food in the European Union makes it especially important in the genetically modified food debate. France is more influenced by food policy than any other European country. I propose that the rejection of and suspicion surrounding genetically modified food began many decades ago and was rooted in the political ideology of Charles de Gaulle, whose party shaped the rebuilding of France after World War II. De Gaulle’s belief system was centered on the complete sovereignty of the French nation. During his time in office, he withdrew from NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), refused to sign the Atmospheric Test Ban Treaty of Moscow in 1963, demanded that all American forces in France leave after World War II, and refused to accept Britain’s membership into the EEC (European Economic Community) (Goubert, 1984). Although the Gaullist movement declined after violent student and worker rebellions in 1968, I propose that de Gaulle’s distrust of American policy coupled with his strong belief in French sovereignty continues to influence contemporary France. These two factors are the primary reasons why the French strongly disapprove of the production and consumption of genetically modified food not only in their country but also in the entire European Union.
France’s Agricultural History in 20th Century

A study of the modern history of French agriculture is essential before examining de Gaulle’s presidency. One of the defining aspects of French culture is its gastronomic excellence. Whether it is a crepe from a street vendor in Paris or foie gras from a fine restaurant in the Dordogne, the French take pride in their cuisine and rich agrarian traditions. France plays an integral role not only in food production in Europe, but also in the rest of the world. France has the biggest food processing industry in Europe (Lawday, 17) and is the leading maize producer in Europe (Menrad, 109). Moreover, it is the only European country self-dependent in regard to food production, and it exports more food than any other country in the EU (Britannica). For Europe, France is the number one provider of oilseeds, cereals, beef, veal, and sugar beets. Because France provides the leadership role in food production for all of Europe, their ideas on food policy profoundly affect the surrounding countries as well as global trade. Because they, along with the rest of the European Union, are resistant to genetically modified food, friction between other large food producers that are not in opposition to this less natural method such as the United States is inevitable. This current friction between the United States and France regarding food policy is reminiscent of the dissention during Charles de Gaulle’s presidency, during which the two countries had many ideological conflicts.

During the 20th century, France clung to its agrarian roots more than other industrialized nations, in particular the United States. In 1914, at the height of industrialization, rural occupations still sustained half of the population (Kedward, 112).
During World War I, when all countries were pushed to modernize, France still supported its rural workers. According to Anglophone French historian Roderick Kedward, it was “apparent that there was a strength in the depth and diversity of rural life which gave France its uniqueness, resistant even to war mechanization” (112). At the end of World War I, the effort to protect agriculture and rural life became extremely important, and rural life transformed into “an evangelical cause, pursued in grandiose plans, election manifestos and parliamentary speeches” (Kedward, 112). In 1919, a novel by Gilbert Stenger was published entitled *Le Retour à la Terre*, encouraging the return to rural society. Other authors, including Maurice Barres and Charles Peguy, also wrote about peasant virtues during the 1920s and 1930s (Kedward, 113). One of the largest banking systems, Crédit Agricole, was first set up in the 1920s to support small villages and encourage the rural lifestyle because many farmers were beginning to move to cities. The extolling of agrarian virtues in France stands in stark contrast to countries like the United States, where urbanization had taken root, and farms were increasingly seen as separate entities. According to research analyst Carl Hebden, “Agriculture in the United States typically occurs on farms that are set apart both physically and psychologically from the urban centers where most of the population lives and also from the ‘natural’ parks and other recreational areas where those urban dwellers go ‘to get away’” (244).

This trend differs from France, where farms are smaller and situated closer to population centers (Hebden, 244). During the Great Depression, France’s dependence on small workshops and peasant self-sufficiency helped the French not to suffer as much as other highly industrialized nations who were beginning to lose small, specialized
businesses in favor of national corporations. Conflicting ideologies arose in the 1930s before World War II, but agriculture continued to dominate the political scene of France, particularly in the Popular Front movement. During World War II, food would continue to be a primary issue during the occupation of France by Germany from 1940-1944. In cities, French citizens had to cope with food shortages by creative means, including rabbit-breeding on town balconies. “Such was the importance of securing extra food, for survival, pride, and identity, that the complexity of the Occupation was often collapsed into two national images: the alien, strutting Germans and the French finding food on the black market” (Kedward, 247). It is perhaps this struggle for food that has helped make the French so insistent on being self-sufficient today. During the Occupation, many of the French fled to the Loire valley, perhaps in an attempt to return to their rural roots and escape the terror of foreign rule. Between eight and ten million people made this journey, and less than a quarter of the people stayed in northern towns, including Paris (Kedward, 241).

During the Occupation, it was Marshal Phillipe Pétain who was voted in by the French Parliament as Head of State, a man who often complied with the occupier’s interests. He looked for opportunities in the German occupation and desired to revive France morally. The cult of Pétain was extremely popular, and he assumed a patriarchal position, speaking to the suffering French people as children who needed the guidance of a virtuous father. The motto of this regime, which was headquartered in Vichy in central France, was “Travail, Famille, et Patrie” (Work, Family, Homeland) which replaced
“Liberté, Fraternité, and Égalité” (Liberty Fraternity, Equality). Pétain highly encouraged rural simplicity in the people. According to Kedward,

“The aim (of Pétain’s ideas) was a ‘return to the land’. State backing was given for the ruralist idyll which has emerged as a response to urban society after the First World War...It was anchored firmly in the French romance of a mythologized past, now seen to be exemplified by the virtues of Pétain, the soldier-leader with a peasant family background” (255).

It was during this struggle that a little known military leader, Charles de Gaulle, stepped forward to defend Free France and struggle against the Vichy regime whose leaders were cowering before the rule of the Germans in favor of subduing their own citizens. It is clear that up until this point, the role of agriculture and food production took on an importance of mythical proportions. It is important also to remember that, already during the 20th century, 1.5 million Frenchmen were killed during World War I and over 2 million men were taken prisoner during World War II. Robert Aron, a French political writer, summarizes the plight of the French population best, “In a period of thirty years, France had known ten years of war, four years of occupation, governments by the Popular Front (Leon Blum and Daladier) and by the extreme right wing (Pétain), attempts at subversion (in Feb. 1934 and Sept. 1944), coming from two extremist camps and often supported by the center” (85).

It is no wonder that the terrors France faced during these 30 years led her people to idealize the rural life. The death of so many of the French people was a direct result of
modernization in military techniques and conflicting international interests. Returning to the land to escape from this outside cruelty seems a logical attempt at self-preservation.

It is evident that the importance of agriculture was a common thread that the French people held onto in the face of violence and change. Although to some it may seem a grasp for an unrealistic idyllic society, to the French the rural idea embodied tradition and stability, two conditions severely lacking in Europe in the early and middle parts of the 20th century. It was Charles de Gaulle who came to lead this generation that had seen so much damage, death, and destruction. He emerged as a leader who desired to create the ideal France, a self-reliant, non-subservient entity. Society ceases to exist without sustenance, and producing food is one way of insuring agricultural sustainability. The French desire their food to reflect quality and superiority, two ideals that de Gaulle encouraged the French to embrace after the suffering during two world wars.

**Introduction to Charles de Gaulle**

“All my life I have had a certain idea of France.” Charles de Gaulle penned as his opening sentence in *Memoires de Guerre*. De Gaulle emerged on the French scene during its occupation by Germany and created Free France with his Appeal of June 18, 1940. (Kedward, 244). Marshall Pétain had recently signed an armistice with Germany and was busy building a large following and speaking to the citizens as if they were children. De Gaulle represented the remnants of the free spirit of the French and when he spoke, he exhorted France and her people. While speaking with Winston Churchill in London, de
Gaulle claimed that the Pétain government had no legal validity and used the slogan, “France has lost a battle but France has not lost the war” (Joxe, 163).

According to French philosopher Raymond Aron, de Gaulle’s rise took place during a period of only six weeks. What were the origins of this incredibly driven military man? He was born in Lille, a city in northern France, in 1890, to Roman Catholic nationalistic, but progressive parents. Graduate of the École Spécial Militaire, POW in WWI, and General in the French Army are just a few of the titles de Gaulle claimed. He is generally regarded as having an exceptional military record, and before World War II, de Gaulle wrote a book entitled, Vers l’armée de métier, encouraging the French army to mechanize and modernize. It is speculated that although the French ignored his book, Hitler may have gleaned inspiration from de Gaulle’s military theories (Aron, 9).

After de Gaulle met with Churchill in 1940, he gained Great Britain’s backing. Financial assistance for the Free French army, navy and air force, along with broadcasting of his speeches on BBC, which were then relayed to France, were just two of the benefits de Gaulle secured from Churchill. On October 27th, de Gaulle declared from Brazzaville, in the French Congo, that the Vichy regime was unconstitutional and that he was the head of the France’s war policy. It is notable that he declared this shortly after Pétain, the leader of the Vichy regime, had met with Hitler at Montoire to declare his intentions of collaborating with the Nazi regime. According to Kedward, “De Gaulle’s was the first national reputation to be made entirely by radio, even as Pétain’s cult was taken into the realms of mythology by radio broadcasts” (278). As the occupation continued, the resistance movement grew and soon included many French
citizens, including women, who could more easily travel without raising suspicion.

Throughout this movement of resistance, de Gaulle faced conflicts with the British and Americans and even from within his own party, the Free French. These struggles were primarily involving leadership quarrels and external as well as internal debates on who should lead Free France. In the end, however, de Gaulle triumphed and would shape the path of France and her policy for the remainder of the century.

**American Resistance to Charles de Gaulle**

From the beginning of the Free French movement, Charles de Gaulle faced resistance from the United States and to a lesser extent from Great Britain. This initial hostility against the leader planted the seeds of de Gaulle’s anti-American sentiments and would eventually have a great effect on French foreign policy that continues to influence contemporary France. After examining this time period, it is difficult to say whether the relationship between the United States and France would have been different if America had been able to see France as de Gaulle saw her— a world power on the level of both the U.S. and Great Britain.

United States’ President Franklin D. Roosevelt had a particular dislike for de Gaulle in spite of the French leader’s rapport with the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. According to Aron, France’s weakened position suited Roosevelt perfectly (151), and the American president tried to exclude de Gaulle from the political process during and after the war. America even sent Petain an ambassador after de Gaulle had declared the Vichy regime illegitimate. According to French historian Pierre Goubert,
“de Gaulle never forgave the Americans for this gesture and made them feel his wrath long afterward” (295). Further according to Aron, “Roosevelt was unrelenting in hostility to de Gaulle. In fact, even many Americans were starting to find Roosevelt’s attitude increasingly unsustainable, among them Eisenhower, who arrived in London in 1944 to take up his post as Supreme Allied Commander” (543).

Perhaps this American hostility toward de Gaulle stemmed from the fact that he was unrelenting in his desire for France to reclaim her role as a world power after World War II. Even after liberation, Roosevelt continued to distrust de Gaulle who immediately began to make efforts to reestablish France as a powerful player in global politics. As de Gaulle’s policy developed, agricultural independence would become an increasingly important factor in global politics. America’s resistance to de Gaulle’s Free France ideals instigated the increasingly extreme distrust between the two countries. Americans viewed France as a country in debt to them after the liberation, and de Gaulle saw France as an independent country ready to rise again. He had no desire to be a part of the American hegemony, and continually he made this clear throughout his presidency. He had a vision of France that extended far beyond what America, particularly Roosevelt, envisioned, and he was not afraid to defend his positions. British historian and author, David Horwarth explains de Gaulle’s philosophy best:

“The General tried (successfully to an astonishing extent) to inspire in his compatriots a desire to shine in the eyes of the world, to be seen as great, as a beacon of light, civilization, liberty. There was a lot of vacuous boasting involved, but his was not an aggressive or vicious nationalism” (113).
Clearly, there was a drive in de Gaulle to succeed and to restore France to her potential. The clash between the American ideology after the war and that of the French is understandable because oddly enough they are strikingly similar. Both countries desired to be the best they could possibly be, and both worked to use their power to influence the surrounding nations. However, when de Gaulle took over France, he inherited a society that had been beaten down by two wars and a foreign occupation. One of France’s strongest assets throughout history had been its agricultural base, which would continue to play a large role as France rebuilt during the remainder of 1940s and 50s. The concept of the superiority of rural life and tradition was far from dead, and Gaullism would help revive this idea and aid in its growth.

Charles de Gaulle’s Ideology

When de Gaulle founded the Free French movement, he was convinced and adamant that France could regain her status as a Great Power (DePorte, 22). The most prominent idea of de Gaulle that still resonates today is that France is a sovereign power, both militarily and culturally. Agricultural independence would rise as an important issue in establishing this sovereignty, and later during the 20th century, pressure from America to follow their food standards would result in strong resistance. De Gaulle would play a prominent role in developing the European Economic Community (EEC), under which the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) established the foundation for current food policy. CAP encouraged and supported small farmers as opposed to large agribusinesses, which were beginning to dominate the American landscape. According to
Horwarth, de Gaulle was associated with certain themes, including the pursuit of the country’s grandeur, the pursuit of an ‘independent’ and proud foreign and defense policy, and the pursuit of national identity (17). As previously mentioned, France is the only self-dependent nation in Europe for food, a testimony to de Gaulle’s successful push for France’s independence through CAP.

Not only did de Gaulle wish to see France restored to her former glory, he believed in the complete superiority of France and refused to settle for mediocrity in any aspect. When de Gaulle met with Harry Hopkins, one of Roosevelt’s closest advisors, was trying to repair lingering hostilities between the two countries after World War II, de Gaulle told him, “The United States has not always understood that the very fate of France is linked to the vocation of greatness” (DePorte, 91). De Gaulle envisioned that, after the war, France could stand on an equal footing with Great Britain and United States, and he pushed to be involved in all negotiations and treaties after World War II (Aron, 159).

In speeches throughout his career, de Gaulle emphasized the importance of sovereignty. In a speech he delivered on Nov. 3, 1959 at the École de Guerre in Paris, de Gaulle said, “The defense of France must be French. That is a necessity which has not been too well understood in recent years” (Macrids, 130). Two years later, he reiterated this same idea when addressing a group of French officers at Strasbourg: “It is true that the sirens of decadence are calling to her from all sides to give up being France, even grow angry that she holds to it and urge her to fall in with the goals and rely on the protection of others” (Macrids, 136). Clearly, de Gaulle was intent on the idea that
France needed to resist the hegemony of the United States. Initially the resistance de Gaulle encouraged was strongly related to military matters. Subsequently, however, de Gaulle would begin pushing for independence in other areas, including agriculture. According to political scientist Roy Racirds, de Gaulle saw the United States as a friend but one that would dwarf France and attempt to mold Europe without considering the interests of the European countries themselves (203).

When Britain, the United States, and France attempted to work together after the war, de Gaulle’s grand ideas often clashed with the policies and agreements set forth by the other two Western powers. Consequently, de Gaulle began to take his country down a path that often raised the eyebrows of the international community. In particular, he strongly resisted movements that were instigated by or included the United States. The path that France took after the war continues to affect policy today.

**Gaullism, the Vth Republic, and Foreign Policy**

“La nation résistante” is a Gaullist abstraction that best captures the portrait of the France that de Gaulle created after the war. It was his conviction that the real France had never surrendered to Hitler during World War II, despite the occupation, and he encouraged this interpretation to the French people. De Gaulle knew that he needed to unify the damaged nation and create a sense of identity. He immediately concentrated on his vision and pursued a leadership role in the “Grand Alliance” with Great Britain, America and the USSR after the war. However, de Gaulle’s wishes were ignored at
Yalta, a conference he was excluded from where leaders from the U.S., Great Britain, and the U.S.S.R. met to discuss post-war reconstruction, and also at Potsdam, another conference discussing post-war developments. According to the former director of the office on Western Europe in the Department of State, A.W. DePorte, the American government made no commitment to support French claims, nor did they believe that there was need or the possibility for the revival of French power (144, 186). During the period following World War II, and throughout the rest of his presidency de Gaulle did little to endear himself to the Americans, and he often aroused more misunderstanding and surprise than meaningful negotiation (Aron, 133).

De Gaulle firmly believed that an aggressive foreign policy was essential to the success of France. Coupled with French sovereignty, a strong foreign policy was a conviction that de Gaulle held onto tenaciously. In 1946, shortly after the war had ended, de Gaulle retired from politics because he could not endure the political infighting and because he disagreed with the constitution established under France’s Fourth Republic. He returned to power, however, in 1958 to create the Fifth Republic and to continue to advocate his ideas of a truly free France. Under the constitution of the Fifth Republic that de Gaulle helped establish, the power of the president was independent of the Parliament. This provision stood in stark contrast to the provisions in the constitution of the previous republic where the Parliament had more control over decision-making. De Gaulle furthered his power as president by using referendums that helped strengthen his authority and helped display that he was not crippled by the desires of the Parliament. He believed in a strong government in which the state led the people, and upon his return
to power, he adamantly pushed for increased independence from Western influence.

De Gaulle, perhaps influenced by the distrust between America and France established during and after World War II, strongly opposed American hegemony in all areas of French life. To more fully understand the vehement reactions the French have against most things deemed American, specifically genetically modified organisms, a technology promoted most strongly by the United States, it is essential to investigate de Gaulle’s foreign policy after he reestablished power in the Fifth Republic. The direction of foreign policy is the strongest predictor of France’s actions both in the past and in the present in regard to international politics. De Gaulle immediately established an environment where the rejection of American hegemony was paramount if France wished to succeed as a nation. Three examples stand out, including his refusal to sign the nuclear test-ban treaty in 1963, his withdrawal from NATO, and his refusal to allow Britain into the EEC.

Nuclear Proliferation

In 1945, after the establishment of the French provisional government, Charles de Gaulle created the Atomic Energy Commission and made France the first nation to have a civilian atomic energy authority. After France lost French Indochina and was embarrassed during the Suez Crisis in 1956, the effort to create atomic weapons and regain legitimacy as a nation became increasingly important. When de Gaulle retook the presidency in 1958, he embraced the idea of “force de frappe” (strike force) and quickly authorized nuclear testing.
De Gaulle had always been a proponent of France developing a strong defense system, and he felt this was the only way that France could retain sovereignty in the face of the American superpower. In 1960, the first nuclear test, code-named Gerboise Bleue occurred in Algeria. In 1963, de Gaulle refused to sign the Test Ban Treaty, which "prohibited nuclear weapon tests 'or any other nuclear explosion' in the atmosphere, in outer space, and underwater" (state.gov). Instead, France continued to test atomic weapons as de Gaulle aggressively pursued a path of strong defense for his country.

According to Swiss economist and businessman Klaus Schwabe,

"For France to become fully equal, de Gaulle demanded that, with American and British assistance, it acquire the status of an independent nuclear power. There was the rub: De Gaulle was convinced that only French possession of the atom bomb would persuade the Americans to consult France and thus to treat it as an equal and great power" (10).

In this action, we see two trends in the thought process of de Gaulle. First, it is clear that de Gaulle believed military independence was essential in establishing a sovereign France. He was aware that without military power, the United States would continue its efforts to dominate the European front. Although this vehement reaction against the United State’s nuclear test ban proposal would imply that the president viewed the States as its enemy, de Gaulle did not dislike the United States. Instead, he wanted to be viewed as an equal. In fact, according to Robert Aron, de Gaulle viewed both Britain and the United States as first-class allies- ones that could withstand strong disagreements because he knew that their kinship would survive.
The second trend observed in de Gaulle’s thought process is that he had a strong desire to have leverage against the United States. Without any military power, the United States could easily force its vision onto both French and European politics. De Gaulle had a strong vision of France and knew that he needed the power to back his convictions. He believed that the nuclear strike force would offer a role to each of the three branches of the armed forces and help create a new army (Joxe, 165). De Gaulle had held this vision of a strong defense system since before World War II, and after the distrust was built between France and the United States, little could have convinced him to stop military progress.

Withdrawal from NATO

De Gaulle’s actions to create a strong military went hand-in-hand with his withdrawal from NATO. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, formed in 1949, was a military alliance whose members agreed on mutual defense in response to violence inflicted on any of the member states. Although France was initially a member, de Gaulle did not approve of the United States’ role in the organization and wanted to create a tripartite directorate that would help equalize France, the United States, and Great Britain.

NATO stood in opposition to the “Grand Design” de Gaulle had for a “European Europe.” He wanted NATO to be subordinate to the tripartite agreement between the three nations and wanted France’s colonial interests such as Algeria to be included under NATO’s coverage. According to British author and researcher James Ellison, de Gaulle felt that by withdrawing from NATO he was symbolically displaying the independence of
France. Soon after his withdrawal, de Gaulle visited Moscow, where he would attempt to be an arbiter between the East and West. On Feb. 21, 1966, de Gaulle reiterated his desire to be sovereign at a press conference and stated, “as regards soil, sky, sea, and forces, any foreign element that would be in France, will in the future be under French command alone” (Ellison, 862). Furthermore, he wrote a letter to American President Lyndon B. Johnson reaffirming that he wanted nothing to do with NATO and wanted everything American out of France.

The result of De Gaulle’s withdrawal from NATO, however, did not have the desired effect, and instead served to augment the Anglo-American alliance by uniting Great Britain and America against a common enemy. Ellison sums up the result of de Gaulle’s obstinacy:

“What de Gaulle had done by pursuing his foreign policies to the point when they destabilized the Atlantic Alliance was to create the conditions which had always produced Anglo-American cooperation: a shared interest in defeating a common enemy” (864).

De Gaulle had chosen a battle in which he was not dominant, and both the Americans and British worked to turn the NATO crisis into an opportunity to build a stronger alliance between the other member states and, in effect, exclude France. The foundations were developing that would affect France’s food policy, especially when genetically modified food began to appear. De Gaulle was sowing the seeds of resistance to the push from American political ideas. De Gaulle had only helped NATO become
more united, and the international community did not accept his unilateralism nor his push for France as a world power.

A new trend in Gaullist policy that continues to affect contemporary France was emerging. In his attempt to make France sovereign, de Gaulle promoted isolationism and alienated his allies. In his eyes, if France could not be on equal footing with Great Britain and the United States, then the country would pursue greatness on her own. Unfortunately, de Gaulle aimed higher than the actual power France held and could leverage after the war. Instead of succeeding in gaining the respect of the United States and achieving his goal of equal power, France symbolically retreated and appeared to pursue policy that had little backing from the international community, namely the member states of NATO. This initiative by de Gaulle to fearlessly disagree with the United States, however, would continue to play an important role in French politics and in their reactions to genetically modified food imports later.

**Britain and the European Economic Community**

In 1957, an international organization called the European Economic Community was created to help economically integrate Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Its goal according to its preamble is to “preserve peace and liberty and to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe.” Under the EEC, the CAP or the Common Agricultural Policy was created, which continues to play an extremely important role in the agriculture of European
countries today. It is CAP that played the greatest role in de Gaulle’s disapproval of admitting Britain into the EEC.

CAP provides agricultural subsidies and guarantees minimum prices for domestic products and import tariffs and quotas on goods from outside the EU. Its intention is to help farmers, and the three major principles it established include market unity, community preference, and financial solidarity. It is under the EEC, that the first trends of sovereignty in agricultural policy in Europe are established. Clearly, with the formation of the EEC, one can see that France had an idea of a Europe that was unified economically as well as free from the influences of United States policy.

When Britain applied for membership in the EEC in 1960, de Gaulle expressed his disapproval. In a press conference held by de Gaulle on Jan. 14, 1963, he clearly outlined why he did not think Britain would be a beneficial member of the EEC.

“Further, this community, increasing in such fashion, would see itself faced with problems of economic relations with all kinds of other States, and first with the United States. It is to be foreseen that the cohesion of its members, who would be very numerous and diverse, would not endure for long, and that ultimately it would appear as a colossal Atlantic community under American dependence and direction and which would quickly have absorbed the community of Europe”

(ena.lu)

In this statement, de Gaulle made it clear that he thought the admittance of Britain into the EEC would allow American influence into the sphere, and that soon American economic policy would dominate. He wanted to protect France and other European
members from this, particularly in regards to agriculture. De Gaulle knew that one of France’s strongest assets was her agricultural base and that American dominance in this field could further weaken France’s attempt to operate as a world power. De Gaulle was bitter toward Britain, primarily because of the demise of the Fouchet Plan, a Gaullist plan for European unity with a permanent base in Paris, and his continued failure at realizing his “Grand Vision.” He was convinced that Great Britain was a “Trojan Horse” for the United States’ geopolitical designs (Moravscik, 7). Further, de Gaulle desired to have politico-military dominance in Europe, and admitting Britain into the EEC would jeopardize this goal. According to historian Charles Cogan,

“De Gaulle’s reasoning appears to have been the following:...He thought he could establish nuclear hegemony over the rest of the continent of Western Europe by virtue of: (1) the suppression of the Multilateral Force, which would have put nuclear weapons in the hands of continental power, (2) the exclusion of Great Britain, a nuclear power, from a continental grouping by his veto of British entry into the Common Market” (Cogan, 243).

De Gaulle was also worried that Britain would not support financing CAP, an essential component that affected and continues to affect the success of French agriculture. Through the EEC, de Gaulle had the opportunity to become a leader of Western Europe, and Britain’s close ties to America posed a threat to this dominance. According to Ellison, “It was this institution which gave France its economic security, a method of containing the Federal Republic of Germany, and the potential to create a power-base
free of American control” (854). Although de Gaulle’s veto of Britain’s admission survived the term of his presidency, Britain eventually joined in 1973.

De Gaulle’s actions during this debate reveal another trend in his policy. He had no desire to be isolationist, and he wanted to work with other European countries. However, de Gaulle strongly opposed any influence of America over Europe. He believed that if the United States began to involve itself in European matters, the European countries would become subservient to the power of the United States. It is evident that after World War II, the United States emerged as the strongest country militarily. De Gaulle wanted Europe, and most especially France, to regain her power and not fall under the influence of the United States. He understood that Britain was closely aligned with the United States in issues related to military intervention and politics, and its admittance could severely weaken the possibility that Europe could retain sovereignty and strength.

Conclusions

In the first part of this examination, we have looked at the history of French agriculture in the 20th century and observed the important and almost mythical importance France placed on the rural lifestyle. During and after WWII, a leader emerged that took control of France in an attempt to make her a sovereign nation and a world power. By looking at examples of Charles de Gaulle’s foreign policy, including his refusal to sign the nuclear test ban treaty, his withdrawal from NATO, and his
resistance to Britain’s admittance into the EEC, we have seen a few trends in the ideology of de Gaulle emerge.

1. France needed to achieve military independence to regain sovereignty. Having nuclear arsenal could help France realize this goal.

2. By regaining sovereignty in military and economic realms, France could better resist American hegemony and could regain her status as a world power.

3. In the pursuit of greatness, de Gaulle sometimes alienated France from other countries, thus harming France’s attempts to rebuild power and creating tension with Great Britain and the United States.

4. The idea of creating a “European Europe” was essential, and keeping America out of economic policy was imperative to make this possible.

5. Specifically the European Common Market emphasized the importance of CAP, thus preserving small farmers and an agriculturally independent Europe.

These trends reemerge throughout the course of modern French history as France struggles to reestablish herself and discover an identity. The next section will reveal how de Gaulle’s ideology was reflected in issues related to food.
Introduction

In the first part of the examination, we established the history of French agriculture and the role food played in the heart of the French people. After World War II, de Gaulle struggled to realize his idea of a great France even as she faced pressures from all sides. Particularly, the French saw the beginning of cultural imperialism from the United States with the introduction of Coca-Cola in the 1950s and later with McDonald's and other fast-food restaurants. By closely examining the resistance to these two American corporations, we can better understand the conflict surrounding genetically modified food. The movements against both Coca-Cola and McDonald's demonstrate the core ideas of Gaullism and reveal France's desire to remain autonomous and sovereign on all levels, especially in regards to food and agriculture.

Coca-colonisation

Shortly after the war ended, America began a movement to broaden the sales of the poplar soft drink, Coca-Cola. Perhaps one of the most recognizable symbols of American capitalism, the drink represented more than just a sweet carbonated beverage to the French. Coca-Cola was founded in the 1880s in Atlanta, Georgia, as a medicinal non-alcoholic beverage. According to 20th century French historian Richard Kuisel,
since its introduction the drink has always been associated with mass advertising, a high consumption society, and free enterprise (98). During WWII, Coca-Cola became a staple item for soldiers fighting overseas. In fact one American soldier even wrote home, “To my mind, I am in this damn mess as much to help keep the custom of drinking Cokes as I am to help preserve the million other benefits our country blesses its citizens with” (Kuisel, 99).

The symbolism of Coca-Cola was not lost on the French who although not ruled by Charles de Gaulle at the time of its introduction, had already been influenced by his provisional government and vision of a Free France. Ironically, the chairman of the board of the Coca-Cola Export Corporation was James Farley, who had previously served as an aid to President Roosevelt. It is likely that Farley was well aware of the tension between Roosevelt and de Gaulle and foresaw the opposition he would face from the French people. When Coca-Cola was introduced to Europe, it faced opposition not only from France. Belgium and Switzerland even filed lawsuits because they thought the drink contained unsafe amounts of caffeine. Other countries in Europe that were influenced by the Communist party resisted Coca-Cola because it symbolized capitalism and the Western world.

In France, the Communists led much of the opposition against the drink, but there were a number of other reasons why the French detested the corporation. Coca-Cola orchestrated a large public relations campaign in an attempt to win the French over to their side. France saw the introduction of Coke as a cultural invasion that threatened their identity and sovereignty. According to Kuisel, “In a small way ‘le défi americain’
(American defiance) had already appeared. Coca-Cola was only one feature of a multifaceted American ‘invasion’ that included Hollywood films, the Reader’s Digest, and tractors” (102). Not only was Coca-Cola viewed as a cultural invasion, but also wine producers were frightened that Coca-Cola could pose a serious threat to the entire wine business. Another worry was that the product had phosphoric acid that acted as a coloring agent and preservative, and the French health code forbade unauthorized chemical additives to food at the time. Instead of addressing these concerns, the company continued to claim that the product was a wholesome drink and waged a battle to make a case for Coke in France. The company even went so far as to go to the United States government and accuse France of discrimination, claiming that the French were not too good for Coca-Cola, a product manufactured by the liberators of France. The recommendation made by the company was that aid be stopped under the Marshall Plan if France did not accept Coca-Cola into their country (Kuisel, 110). Le Monde, one of the most popular French newspapers, addressed the issue of the symbolic value of the drink. French journalist Robert Escarpit wrote,

“Conquerors who have tried to assimilate other peoples have generally attacked their languages, their schools, and their religions. They were mistaken. The most vulnerable point is the national beverage. Wine is the most ancient feature of France. It precedes religion and language; it has survived all kinds regimes. It has unified the nation” (Le Monde, 23 Nov. 1949).
In this article, one can see the extreme importance France places on her agricultural strengths, most notably wine. Eventually, the Coca-Cola corporation won and the drink began to be sold in France; however, it enjoyed relatively little popularity, and in the 1980s, France along with Italy, drank less Coke than any other Western European nation (Kuisel, 115). The vitriolic battle waged before its introduction revealed the mindset of the French people after the war and their attitudes toward any introduction of an American product into their culture.

The Gaullist trend revealed in this period of resistance reflects the idea that the French will never settle for less than autonomy. To the French people, the introduction of Coca-Cola symbolized another form of occupation. Although not a physical occupation like that of the Germans, the French felt the Americans wanted to invade the cultural aspects that had defined France for so long, most notably the culture of their food and drink. To them, Coca-Cola represented American capitalism. Although the country was appreciative of America after its liberation, the French desperately desired to redefine their identity without American influences. Another undercurrent was the fear that American products would affect the economic status of France in a negative way. Wine and agriculture were then and still continue to be extremely important aspects of French culture and economics. To the French, the introduction of the soft drink could destroy a significant part of their proud culture. Similar to the philosophy of de Gaulle, the French idea of being truly free French and not French-Americans who cowered to the desires of the economically and militarily stronger United States was quite prevalent.

The resistance to Coca-Cola had both cultural and economic significance as the French
sought to avoid a material good that could weaken their identity after the war. It was only the beginning of America’s attempts at capitalistic ventures in France.

José Bové and McDonald’s

On August 12, 1999, José Bové, along with other local French sheep farmers, dismantled a McDonald’s in response to America’s attack on Roquefort cheese, one of France’s Aveyron department’s main exports. After Europe refused to import hormone-fed beef, the United States retaliated by placing high tariffs on certain luxury food items, one of which was Roquefort cheese. Bové and five other farmers were sent to prison, and Bové became an international symbol and representative of the small farmer standing up against supranational corporations, globalization, and Americanization.

In the book The World is Not For Sale, French farmers José Bové and Francois Dufour are interviewed extensively about their views on McDonald’s, agricultural issues, and even genetically modified food. Their responses reflect the mindset so entrenched in the French embodying many elements of Gaullism. Bové says, “We don’t want hormones in our food; they’re a risk to public health, and go against our farming ethics. At a more fundamental level, imposing hormones on us means that our freedom of choice in the food and culture we want is seriously restricted...we want something different from freedom of the market and the liberal economy” (21)

Bové’s statement probes a little deeper into the root of France’s problem with any foreign power having control over an aspect of French life. He sees it as an ethical question. Essentially, Bové wants to conduct agriculture the traditional and natural way
without another country telling him how to grow his food. He wants the choice of what
to eat and what not to eat. When de Gaulle rejected British membership in the EEC, a
major reason was the difference in agricultural practices coupled with the fact that Britain
imported many goods from America and was influenced by her policy. His main worry
was that Britain would not support CAP, a policy that insured the success of small
farmers in Europe. This conflict reflects the contrast in agricultural practices, both
economically and ethically, between the United States and France. With Bové’s protest
of McDonald’s the two ideologies came to a head— the American philosophy of fast,
cheap food and large business and the French philosophy of small farm support and
traditional agricultural practices.

At the time of the protests, both Dufour and Bové were members of the Farmer’s
Confederation that was founded in 1987 to replace intensive farming with more
sustainable practices that benefited both the land and the income of small farmers. To
them, McDonald’s and other fast food chains, such as Quick and Burger King,
represented “malbouffe” or junk food. Dufour states, “Today the word has been adopted
to condemn those forms of agriculture whose development has been at the expense of
taste, health, and the cultural and geographical identity of food. Junk food is the result of
the intensive exploitation of the land to maximize yield and profits” (Bové, 54). To
farmers such as Bové and Dufour, the most important aspect of farming is not receiving
the greatest amount of profit. It is instead to create a high quality product that reflects the
culture of the region, an embodiment of the Gaullist concept of “grandeur.” During de
Gaulle’s presidency, he always aimed at and pushed for the greatness of France and encouraged her not to fall to the wishes of other countries. This idea has clearly passed over into agriculture, where the farmers view their food production with a sense of pride. Also, Dufour points out that the geographical identity of the food is important. Because farms in the United States are often separated and out of view from the majority of the population, geographical identity becomes less of an issue. In France people are more likely to live in close proximity to farms, thus making the location more significant.

Also, regions in France have highly specialized foods that mark their identity. For example, the Larzac region that both Bové and Dufour are from, is known for its Rocquefort cheese, and Camembert cheese comes from the Normandy region in northern France. The Provence region is famous for ratatouille and Brittany is known for its crepes. De Gaulle once said, “Only peril can bring the French together. One can’t impose unity out of the blue on a country that has 265 different kinds of cheese.” He would have understood Dufour’s emphasis on the importance of geographical identity in regards to food. With globalization and the introduction of fast food chains, this geographical identity is lost.

It is clear from both Bové and Dufour’s perspective that the agricultural issue goes far beyond simply a dislike for the golden arches. It is a criticism of the entire economic structure of the free market. Dufour says,

“These rules of international trade provide for restrictions on the free trade in agricultural and food products only if scientific research has proved that
they are dangerous to human health. The free market pays little heed to the need for caution, still less to social and environmental considerations. We’re dealing with a market, aided and abetted by science, which works against the people and the land” (Bové, 80).

In this statement, Dufour implies that the free market is not the best way to regulate food production. Again, the clash between the American and the French philosophies surfaces along with the general distrust of scientific innovation and tendency to favor natural practices. This concept of distrust will be examined further in Part III. However, the distrust can be directly linked to de Gaulle who never trusted the American government and built much of his foreign policy around questioning and refusing to comply with American demands. The French people have adopted this distrust and view the scientific innovation of hormone-injected cows as synonymous with America’s attempt at unilateral dominance in the agricultural sector.

Bové and Dufour continue their critique and apply it to genetically modified foods as well. Bové says of genetic manipulation,

“The incentive to research this field is evident: the genetic manipulation of a plant or an animal enables companies, by enforcing industrial patents, to become owners of all the modified plants and animals subsequently produced. By buying up rival seeds and patents, or removing competitors from the market, a firm can become the owner of an entire species. It’s the logic of industry, applied to life. Genetic manipulation is a way of being paid royalties for life itself” (Bové, 85).
In this statement, Bové and Dufour paint a grim vision of genetic manipulation. They see it as an attack on the very ownership of food, a metaphorical invasion and occupation of the animals, which they care for and raise. To Bové and Dufour, the main aim of genetic manipulation is to achieve ownership over life so a profit can be derived. This is capitalism at its height, and farmers such as Bové and Dufour are passionate about preserving the agricultural tradition that has already survived extreme trials of the 20th century, including two wars and industrialization.

It is important to study closely the words of Bové and Dufour because they have become the face of French farming in the international community for the 21st century. Their ideology has many influences, and certainly the ideas of de Gaulle sway their entire philosophy. In the words of these two French farmers, we see both resistance to the free market and to the scientific innovations of American agriculture. They symbolize the wishes of de Gaulle for France to retain her sovereignty and to be self-dependent. They also embody the idea of French “grandeur” that de Gaulle wished for France. To them and to many of the French, genetically modified food does not represent progress and innovation. Instead it is the economic and cultural invasion that de Gaulle resisted so strongly during his presidency- it is an attack on French soil in its purest sense.
PART III: A Tree All Natural

The French and resisting genetically modified organisms

Introduction

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) were developed in the 1970’s but did not become visible in the French media until the late 1990s (Cheveigne, 162). In the United States, there was little debate over the introduction of such organisms, but the situation in Europe was drastically different. Europeans in all countries resisted the idea of modifying organisms, and the European Union drafted stringent regulations regarding GMOs in the 1990s. This section will outline current policies in Europe compared with the United States policy, as well as explain the reason for these policy differences. The overarching hypothesis presented by scholars is that Europeans generally distrust institutions more than Americans do and view genetically modified food as risky (Cheveigne 2002, Traill et. al. 2006, Olofsson et. al. 2006). It is essential, however, to discover where this distrust stems from on a country-to-country basis. Because France provides the highest amount of food exports to the European Union, their opinion on GMO’s plays a large role in food policy. This foundation of distrust comes directly from the foreign policy example set up by Charles de Gaulle after WWII and is augmented by the connection between agriculture and identity in the French culture, as well as from the economic consequences of a European society dominated by GMOs.
Public Opinion, Trust, and Risk

Public opinion forms the basis for the policy created by the European Union regarding GMOs. There are two essential aspects of public opinion that have been researched: perceived risk of genetically modified food and trust in the institutions that create GMOs. In a study conducted by British professor of Agriculture and Food Economics W.B. Traill, respondents from the United States, France, and the United Kingdom were given surveys to rank perceived risks of genetically modified food. More than half, 60 percent, of the French rated genetically modified foods as high in risk and low in benefits. Respondents from Great Britain and the United States generally regarded genetically modified food as having both high risks and high benefits. Respondents in the United States and the United Kingdom thought there was a trade-off whereas France was more skeptical (16). The study attributed these results to the many dimensions of GMO risk-benefit perceptions including moral concerns, health concerns and an absence of perceived benefits (Traill et al., 17).

In another study conducted by Senior Researcher for the Centre National de la Récherche Scientifique Suzanne DeCheveigne, the concept of risk is examined more thoroughly. According to the study, 74 percent of French in 1999 thought that GM foods were “risky” (DeCheveigne, 163). The author analyzed the language used by respondents when reacting to the concept of genetically modified foods and found that the risks of GMOs were associated with eugenics, and artificiality, and ethics. The author concludes that “GMOS were rejected not because of the risk they might present
for the environment but because they were seen as the first step toward a *Brave New World*" (DeCheveigne, 163).

In yet another study conducted by Anne Olofsson, professor of Social Sciences at Mid Sweden University, the issue of trust was examined in regard to institutions that produced genetically modified organisms. Surveys showed that in France, only 21.7 percent of respondents found genetically modified food morally acceptable compared to 41 percent in Germany and 43 percent in Sweden (Olofsson, 611). This suggests that even among European countries, France displays a significantly higher resistance to GMOs. The study goes on to claim that, since Europeans generally have lower trust in institutions based on survey results, they view genetically modified food more skeptically.

The French public views genetically modified food as being produced by untrustworthy institutions and as having high risks with low benefits. In a study done in the rural area of Gers, France, scholar Karen Montague found that, “Overall, in fact, trust appears to be the most important criterion in the evaluation of food quality. Even the notion of risk was associated with the idea of not poisoning oneself, with trust” (163). Citizens of these rural areas preferred buying fresh products that were recommended to them by a family member, friend or neighbor. This is important to note because it brings us back to the first part of this essay where the agricultural history of France was examined. The French are much more closely tied to traditional agrarian roots than are Americans or even other people in the European Union. These agrarian ties contribute to
the distrust of large institutions. Many of the French still choose to rely on local markets for their food.

From these studies, one can see the connection between de Gaulle and his Anti-American tendencies and French resistance to American food movements. De Gaulle did not trust America after stressed relations with Franklin Roosevelt, and his foreign policy reflected this in many matters. In an effort to resist hegemony, he assumed the role of the leader who intended to make France a sovereign nation. The current public opinion appears to echo these sentiments in their distrust of agribusinesses that produce genetically modified organisms. The French see the businesses as a foreign entity that threatens their local culture and identity. Creating an identity for France was one of de Gaulle’s main missions as President after World War II, and to the French people, resisting genetically modified food is an important part of maintaining that nationalistic vision. Further policy reflects this lack of trust in the safety of GMOs.

Genetically Modified Food Policy in Europe and the United States

The manifestation of these cultural differences between Europe, specifically France, and the United States can be found in their policies regarding genetically modified organisms. The most marked difference between the European Union and America is that the EU has drafted specific policies to regulate the labeling and assessment GMOs. In the United States, GMOs are regulated through pre-existing legislation. To understand the legislation put forth by the EU, one must first understand the difference between a directive and a regulation. In a directive, details of
implementation are left up to the member state. A regulation is more specific, and details are mandated and apply equally to every member state of the EU. The first directive regarding GMOs was proposed in 1986. The second article of this directive defined a genetically modified organism as an “organism in which the genetic material has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally by mating and/or natural recombination” (Office of the European Communities, 1990a). A number of regulations followed, including Regulation No. 258/97- ‘Novel Foods and Novel Food Ingredients.’ This regulation mandated that GM foods containing recombinant DNA be labeled, whether or not they were ‘significantly’ different from conventional food. Next, Regulation 1139/89 required food containing ingredients from GM maize and soya be labeled. Regulation 49/2000 exempted food from being labeled GM food if the proportion of GM food was no more than one percent (Toke, 158).

These European regulations and directives all deal with the labeling of genetically modified food. The prevailing belief is that the consumer has a right to choose whether or not to consume modified substances. According to businessman and agri-food spokesman, Marin Livermore, the European Union has “one of the most complex and rigorous sets of regulations relating to any food product anywhere in the world” (375). Upon first glance, the idea of labeling genetically modified food does not seem drastic, but it has major implications that affect both its acceptance and its rejection.

In examining United States policy regarding genetically modified food, one finds a completely different picture. Unlike in Europe, where foods are highly regulated from
production to sale, scientific assessment of food in the United States is minimal.

Companies notify the Food and Drug Administration that their GMOs are similar to conventional foods, and then the modified foods are viewed as foods that are “Generally Regarded as Safe” (Toke, 33). If a company claims that its food is equivalent to the original unmodified organism, the food is not subject to any scientific assessment.

According to British environmentalist David Toke,

“Because GM foods are no different to conventional foods, the US system involves no special checks on GM food safety, merely a demonstration that the food is ‘substantially equivalent’ to conventional food. Indeed even this demonstration has been on a voluntary basis” (138).

Moreover, labeling of genetically modified food is completely voluntary in the US market, and labeling is only allowable if it is not used to disadvantage GM food products. The idea is that forcing labeling implies that GM food may be something people should or want to avoid. Therefore, companies that produce foods derived from GM products argue that their sales could be affected if labeling were forced. This sets up the main ideological difference between Europe and the United States that has manifested itself in the policy differences. In the EU, the policy reflects that there is a risk associated with consuming genetically modified food, and thus it should be labeled. In the US, labeling is voluntary to avoid implying there is any risk in consuming GMOs.

One of the arguments explaining the basis for this policy difference is that the United States operates under utilitarian principles, whereas Europe acts based upon precautionary principles. This means that America practices a libertarian philosophy.
"The libertarian ethic holds that human beings should be maximally free of constraint, subject to the condition that their actions should not harm or constrain others. Innovators should be free to innovate" (Thompson, 24). This principle applies to genetically modified food because GMOs have not been unquestionably proven as detrimental to the health of the population. Therefore, no specific policy is deemed necessary for GMOS, and the cost of not producing and selling genetically modified food outweighs the cost of the possible consequences of GMO consumption in the eyes of American policy makers. This perspective can be described as utilitarian as well as capitalistic. According to Michigan State Philosophy of Technology professor Paul Thompson, in the United States three values specify how the utilitarian principles are used in evaluating agricultural biotechnology. The approach is outcome oriented, data driven, and comparative (Thompson, 45). Basically, this means that when the United States analyzes policy on genetically modified foods, numbers are more important than unproven health risks. The United States therefore does not create policy nor highly regulate genetically modified food because the economic benefits outweigh the hypothetical detrimental health and societal effects.

Conversely, scholars argue that Europeans create policy based upon the precautionary principle. According to Thompson the precautionary principle is the "preference for statistical and evidential burdens of proof that favor public and environmental health interests over commercial and industrial interests in cases where there is little scientific consensus on the levels of risk associated with the practice" (Thompson, 47). Basically, in scientific issues where the health benefits are not yet
proven, European policymakers will err on the side of caution, whereas American policy
makers will err on the side of economic benefit.

Because the United States possesses relative economic strength, their approach to
policy also affects global policy. The United States creates policy that maximizes
economic benefits, leaving countries that choose to consider social and health
consequences in their policy behind in the field of international market competition.
Therefore, America exerts economic pressure on other countries with its agricultural
policy because countries that do not wish to use genetically modified food cannot
produce food at competitive prices.

Clearly, de Gaulle foresaw this conflict between American ideas and French ideas
when he strongly resisted the entrance of America's greatest ally, Great Britain into the
EEC. Primarily, he was concerned with the Common Agricultural Policy, and the fear
that Britain would express the interests of American policymakers. De Gaulle desired to
preserve the interest of the small farmer, whereas America was moving toward large
corporate agribusiness. He knew that Americans would dominate the agricultural sector
if they could, and agricultural independence was essential to France's success and
autonomy. It was one of the ways France could reestablish itself as a superpower
alongside America and Great Britain. Although he could not foresee the development of
genetically modified foods, de Gaulle warned against allowing America to influence
France with its policy because he believed it would compromise the sovereignty of
France and Europe as a whole.
The American and European policies regarding GMOs come into conflict both at a cultural level and at an economic level. The European Union has based its current policy upon precautionary principles and factored in possible social and health consequences, whereas the United States has few regulations in place and instead favors reaping the economic benefits of GMOs.

21st century Gaullism and Conclusions

The current European Union policy regarding the labeling of genetically modified foods is a by-product of the political ideology of Charles de Gaulle. Tracing the history of agriculture in France, one sees a country where agrarian tradition has always been highly valued, even as the push for modernization and industrialization grew. France has retained many small farms and even Crédit Agricole, the bank dedicated to helping preserve small village farmers still thrives as a leading financial institution. During WWII, the French suffered under an occupation by the Germans and saw their way of life threatened. Self-sufficiency became paramount.

Charles de Gaulle established the basis for foreign policy that continues to influence France today. After strained relations with Franklin D. Roosevelt during and after the liberation of France, he pushed for sovereignty, both economically and militarily. He also wanted France to be part of a tripartite agreement with Great Britain and the United States. To push for this sovereignty and "certain idea of France," he embarked upon often-controversial policy proposals that often frustrated and confused the United States. First, he refused to stop testing and building a nuclear arsenal because
he felt military independence was essential to maintain sovereignty. Second, he withdrew from NATO because he felt it reflected the ideas of the United States, and he desired a tripartite agreement between France, Great Britain, and the United States. Third, he strongly resisted the admission of Great Britain into the EEC because he felt the British would simply be pawns for American policy ideas. Particularly, he desired to protect the Common Agricultural Policy that aided small farmers.

These examples of policy established France as a nation that was not afraid to stand up against America, even when France was much weaker economically and militarily. De Gaulle established both passion and pride in a nation that had lost an entire generation during World War I, and that had been occupied less than ten years later by a neighboring country. He refused to become a pawn to the wishes of America, even in issues relating to agriculture. During the 1950s, the French strongly resisted the introduction of Coca-Cola into their country because they viewed it as a cultural invasion and thought it would threaten the viability of their national drink, wine. When the United States tried to impose the import of hormone injected cow milk, the French resisted once again, and farmers Bové and Dufour became the face of the small French farmer. They became outspoken farmers decrying the capitalistic and invasive nature of American agricultural policy. Both of these reactions reflected the Gaullist ideas of sovereignty and independence for France.

When genetically modified foods were introduced, all European countries showed strong resistance to importing or growing the altered substances. The public, particularly
the French, showed low trust in institutions that created the food and also viewed the food as having high risk and low benefits. The French policy reflects these views, and currently all genetically modified food must be labeled. The United States has no such rule. Charles de Gaulle had a strong vision for a European Europe and a French France, and he warned his fellow citizens of American hegemony. He desired to create a sovereign nation so that France would never again fall prey to occupiers and so that she could always preserve her identity. The agricultural policy of America symbolizes a form of occupation. It is the cultural invasion of France through one of the most important parts of her identity, her food. If Charles de Gaulle were alive today, one can imagine him standing strongly against the idea of genetically modified food supporting the vital and cohesive concept of French grandeur, where the food is natural, homegrown, hormone free, and, most importantly, 100 percent French.
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