In this article, Christopher Annear examines the motivations behind President Mwanawasa’s refusal to admit genetically modified foods into the country, even as aid. Annear explains that food is not only used to prevent hunger. In each society, different foods play different social roles. A lot of a person’s day is spent gathering food, preparing food, cooking food, and setting up for a meal. Certain foods are staples in certain social groups diets. For example, nshima - a think porridge - is consumed at practically every meal in Zambia. Despite the fact that people have food, a lack of nshima causes them to say that they haven’t eaten anything all day. Wanting food that has cultural significance, Annear asserts, is a main reason that Zambians want a say in the kinds of food they get as aid from Western countries.

Annear also tells about how food has eased tensions and ended conflicts between different clans in Zambia. In some cases, like that of Bemba nag Ngoni, the foods that each group eats has created friendly relations between the two groups because they can poke fun at the kinds of food that the other eats.

There could be other motivations for Zambia’s refusal to allow genetically modified food into the country. Due to relations with European Union countries - some of which are protesting genetically modified foods - Zambia fears that allowing this kind of food into the country will decrease the export of food to European countries. This is, however, a speculative claim because currently, the amount of food that Zambia exports to European Union countries is minimal.

An important motive for Zambia to refuse genetically modified foods is that it gets the country recognition internationally. Instead of being another “donor dependent” country, Zambia is now getting a voice in genetically modified food debates because it refuses to allow such foods into the country. Thus, President Mwanawasa’s motivations are not only cultural, but political as well.

The President of Zambia has received a lot of criticism for banning genetically modified food from his country. It is important to look at through the motivations behind this decision. Allowing genetically modified food into the country could have cultural and environmental impacts (occuring from the interbreeding of genetically modified food with native food, for example). Not only this, but also in demanding to be able to decide what food it wants to be sent for aid, Zambia is gaining an international voice and is not just another country that needs Western aid.

Annear could perhaps continue his research and write a follow-up piece that examines the impacts of President Mwanawasa’s ban on genetically modified food on the people of Zambia and whether or not the country is actually gaining an international voice.

Good topic for this assignment, although Gastronomica is not the strongest source.