



## Fortnightly Bulletin on Genetic Engineering South Against Genetic Engineering (SAGE)

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### 64 villages of Uttar Pradesh, India pledge to remain free of genetically modified crops

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*Press Release, 7 February 2007*

Forum for Biotechnology & Food Security

At a time when genetically modified crops/foods are shrouded in controversy, 64 villages of Chitrakoot and Banda districts in Uttar Pradesh today declared themselves to be GM-free.

*About 2,000 farmers and farm workers gathered at village Ganivan, Chitrakoot and pledged to never cultivate genetically modified crops. Instead, they will undertake organic farming, and also prepare their own seeds and fertilizers to promote sustainable farming. This is for the first time when such a pledge has been made by farmers anywhere in the country.*

Organised by the Deen Dayal Research Institute (DRI), the event marks a turning point when farmers, realizing the follies of "modern" agriculture, have decided to go the natural way in order to reverse the devastation caused by it. The gathering was addressed by the nonagenarian Sh. Nanaji Deshmukh, chairman of DRI, food and trade policy analyst, Mr. Devinder Sharma, and the noted organic farmer from Haryana, Mr. Ramesh Dagar. Senior officers from district administration, agriculture departments and Krishi Vigyan Kendras also attended the meeting

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*\*logo courtesy- JIGMOD*

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## ***Tamil Nadu: COMPENSATION OR PUBLIC RELATIONS?***

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*Please read the note from Mr. Jai Krishna of Greenpeace and the reports from the media. Please see how the Government of Tamil Nadu has openly aligned itself with Monsanto and issued a threat to Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and Extension officials that if they do not support Bt, action will be taken against them. This is a big challenge for our friends in Tamil Nadu.*

Dear friends,

It may well be the first time the company Mahyco has provided compensation to farmers accepting its failure of crops. This was possible only because of the existing animosity created during the destruction of the GE rice field trial in Coimbatore on November 10th and subsequent failures due to Bt cotton in the state of Tamil Nadu.

Note the fact that the news is underplayed: it does not contain the figure of Rs.63, 58,000. This along with the previous news of compensation in Salem, for 9.86 lakhs makes it the highest compensation ever accepted by Mahyco (read Monsanto) for Bt cotton losses since the first time it introduced Bt cotton in 2002, a sum of Rs. 73,44,000 ( 7.3 million rupees).

Also the latest news is so under covered that even the name Mahyco is not present. And the previous article has quotes from the Tamil Nadu agricultural university that the soil condition was the reason behind the failure, making the compensation from Mahyco appear like an act of philanthropy.

### ***Minister gives compensation to farmers***

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Minister for Agriculture Veerapandi S. Arumugam on Thursday distributed compensation to 996 farmers whose crop was damaged after using transgenic seeds of a multinational company.

Participating in a function at Bommidi near here the Minister said 996 farmers who took up cotton cultivation on 1271.60 acres of land in Bommidi and Pappireddipatti areas suffered crop loss. Thanks to the initiative of the State Government the seed firm offered compensation of Rs. 5,000 per acre, Mr Arumugam said. **The Minister asked agriculture officials to educate farmers on modern cultivation methods, proper utilization of fertilizers and pest management while using transgenic seeds.**

He asked farmers to make use of various government schemes. Collector Pankaj Kumar Bansal said the Government had allotted Rs. 19 crore to be provided as subsidy for drip irrigation to farmers.

He asked the farmers to adopt effective water management practices to increase their crop yield in tune with nature

<http://www.hindu.com/2007/02/10/stories/2007021005440500.htm>

## ***Solatium given to ryots affected by 'BT' cotton***

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Even as a debate over adoption of GE (Genetically Engineered) crops rages on, Mahyco, one of the front running Bt cotton dealers in India, has given solatium to farmers affected by cultivation of Bt cotton.

For the first time in the state, Mahyco distributed solatium to the tune of Rs 9.86 lakh to 88 of the 125 affected farmers of Omalur and Kadayampatty areas during a function held in Poosaripatty near Omalur on Sunday.

More than a month ago, about 125 farmers of Omalur and the adjoining Kadayampatty complained of huge loss due to the cultivation of Bt cotton seeds, supplied by Mahyco, in over 198 acres of field. Subsequently, several NGOs and environmental groups conducted field studies there.

Following the farmers' complaints, media reports and the instructions of State Agriculture Minister Veerapandy S Arumugam, TNAU scientists conducted studies to find the causes for the failure of Mahyco supplied Bt cotton seeds in the region.

In the mean time, the State Government held negotiations with Mahyco and convinced them to pay Rs 5,000 per acre as solatium to the affected farmers. Accordingly, Arumugam distributed Rs 9.86 lakh compensation to 88 ryots on Sunday.

The rest of the farmers would be paid within two days, officials assured.

**Arumugam advised TNAU officials and Mahyco staff to extend necessary technical and intellectual support to the farmers before they started cultivation. He also warned TNAU scientists and extension wing officials of stern action if they failed to allay the fears of the farmers about Bt cotton seeds.**

As regards the impact of Bt seeds in Omalur and its surrounding areas, Arumugam, citing the TNAU report, said variation in soil condition was the main reason for failure of Bt seeds, which were subjected to thorough research by the TNAU and subsequently approved by the State.

The minister also handed over five vehicles worth Rs 21.25 lakh to Seed Certification Officers of Salem, Coimbatore, Trichirapalli, Madurai and Vellore.

<http://floss.sarai.net/newsrack/Browse.do?jsessionid=a88L9dOBeKjg?owner=indiatgether&issue=agriculture&catID=1&start=21>

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## Article: What's that on your plate?

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**By Suman Sahai**

Genetic engineering, by transferring genes from one organism to another, a number of genetically engineered (GE) foods are being developed that cannot be developed in nature.

*The development of such GE foods has raised uncomfortable questions about the nature of foods that are being introduced into the food chain by the corporations that are the principal proponents of genetically engineered products.*

The food that people eat is conditioned by the religious, social and cultural context of individuals and communities. Food is also such a personal thing and so integral to the survival of the human species that there are strong likes and dislikes associated with it and strong cultural taboos are not uncommon in communities. Vegetarians will not eat meat in any form, and Hindus, for instance, consider the eating of beef sacrilege. With new technologies, however, scientists are producing a range of strange, unnatural foods that blur the conventional distinctions that people have made - like fish with tomato genes in it or rice engineered to produce pig vaccines. Many foods are being engineered with human genes ... is that acceptable, or does it recall cannibalism? Do vegetarians want *aloo tamatar ki sabzi* with some fish genes in it? Or how about some fish ketchup on pakoras? What if the rice in your thali is contaminated with rice that is engineered to produce pig vaccines?

This problem is particularly troubling because it is impossible to segregate rice with pig vaccines from normal rice, or food corn from corn engineered to produce drugs for pigs. Past experience has shown that these kinds of engineered crops cannot be kept segregated and will almost always land up in the food chain. The Starlink Corn in the US containing an allergen was forbidden for human use and was released only for animal feed. But it got mixed up in food corn and landed up in corn products in Japan, UK, Canada and other countries in Europe. The unlicensed GE rice of Bayer has escaped from trial plots which were closed down as far back as 2001 in the US and is being detected in countries in Europe and in New Zealand now, in 2006. Similarly, unapproved GE rice from trial plots in China has found its way into the food chain and is showing up in Europe.

The creation of these bizarre foods can be linked directly to the entry of large corporations into agriculture biotechnology and food production. Corporations create foods that can be patented, not necessarily those that solve any real problems in agriculture, or those are geared to address food security. But why should such foods be produced? So that companies can claim them as inventions and take out patents on them? Who asked us, the consumers? Who has determined that these kinds of unnatural foods will be produced and introduced into our food chain, whether by accident or design? Who asked us if we want to eat tomatoes that had been engineered with fish genes or whether we are willing to take the risk of having rice with pig vaccines getting mixed up with our rice?

The question of 'unnatural' foods and 'taboo' foods is a sensitive issue. People have strong cultural and religious conditioning and beliefs regarding the food they are willing to eat. Introducing foods containing genes from sources that are culturally or religiously prohibited, and that too without clearly labelling them as such, is unethical and unacceptable. Corporations are alert to this stance, and continuously lobby against any kind of labeling that might give away the true origins of the foods they sell.

### Safety

Apart from this, is the question of safety. You have become familiar with Bt cotton and the problems associated with it, leading to acute farmer distress. Bt cotton is a genetically engineered plant designed to make the crop resistant to pests such as the bollworm. The seeds are created by inserting a gene construct containing the toxin producing gene (called Cry1Ac) from a naturally occurring soil bacterium called *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) into the cotton plant. Once the Bt gene starts producing the toxin inside the plant, the plant creates its own toxin to kill the pests. In India trials for Bt brinjal, Bt bhindi, Bt tomato, Bt cauliflower, Bt cabbage and Bt rice are under way. Do we want to eat foods that contain genes that produce toxins?

Radically altered foods, developed so recently and with so little testing, cannot be considered safe as food. Natural foods have been domesticated over hundreds, if not thousands of years. Their drawbacks have been detected and their safety established. They are considered safe foods for that reason. That cannot be said for genetically engineered foods which are not even 10 years old.

### A little of this, a little of that

Here are some examples of foods that are currently being researched, and may one day turn up on our plates:

Pig genes in rice: Three kinds of pig genes are being put into the rice plant Nihonbare in Japan. These rice plants manage to survive the application of plant killing herbicides.

Human genes in rice: Japanese researchers have inserted a gene from the human liver into rice to enable it to digest pesticides and industrial chemicals. The gene makes an enzyme, code-named CPY2B6, which can break down harmful chemicals in the body. An American company called Applied Phytogenics is producing rice genetically engineered with two human genes lactoferrin and lysozyme, to protect plants against fungal and animal pests. Ventria Bioscience in California is developing rice containing human genes to produce the proteins lactoferrin and lysozyme. This genetically engineered rice is to be used as a treatment for diarrhoea.

### Other strange foods

- Washington State University is testing barley altered with human genes for lactoferrin, lysozyme, antitrypsin and antithrombin.
- Meristem Therapeutics company in France is field testing maize genetically engineered with human lactoferrin genes
- Genes from the rabies virus have been inserted into tomatoes to produce an edible vaccine
- The U.S. company Prodigene was found to contaminate soybean with a GE corn engineered to produce an experimental pig vaccine, and was fined.
- Researchers at the University of Guelph (Canada) have produced the genetically engineered Enviropig to excrete less phosphate in its dung.
- Human genes to produce insulin and vaccines are being put into crops like corn, tomato and rice .

<http://www.indiatogether.org/2007/feb/opi-crossgene.htm>

### ▪ *News from DDS*

### **Press release: Plea to halt cultivation of Bt hybrids**

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**Feb 4<sup>th</sup> 2007**

Hyderabad: The Deccan Development Society (DDS) has asked the Government to declare a moratorium on the cultivation of Bt hybrids until a comprehensive study is undertaken on the possible impact of Bt hybrids on environment, livestock and human health.

In a statement, M. Abdul Qayyum and S. Kiran, DDS scientists, said the deleterious affects of Bt cotton on livestock have resurfaced in Warangal district. In Gammadavelli village, symptoms appeared more on the goats compared to sheep. Bloating of stomach, mucous flow from nostrils, reddish urination were some of the symptoms. Besides, some shepherds also had bloating of stomach and skin allergies in the neck region, the release said.

<http://www.hindu.com/2007/02/04/stories/2007020417070300.htm>

## ***Press meet: Bt leaves bad for animals: Experts***

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**Feb 15<sup>th</sup> 2007**

Hyderabad, Feb. 14: Hundreds of sheep and buffaloes have died after eating Bt cotton crop waste in Warangal district. Deccan Development Society (DDS), which is advocating bio-diversity for sustainable agriculture on Wednesday discussed the issue with scientists, ecologists and farmers from China, Thailand, Cambodia and the Philippines.

DDS director P. Satheesh said that more than 2,500 animals had died in recent months eating Bt cotton leaves. Shepherds of Gummadavelli village V. Yadaiah and M.Malliah said they had incurred huge losses due to the death of the animals, he said. Chinese scientist Dr Yang Song and Thailand's Alternative Agriculture Network president Day Cha also expressed the same views. They said due to Bt cotton cultivation, animals were dying and environment was getting polluted. They also felt that genetic engineering would not be an alternative to sustainable agriculture.

<http://www.deccan.com/City/Citynews.asp#Bt%20leaves%20bad%20for%20animals:%20Experts>

***SAGE requests you to kindly send us news and issues related to genetic engineering and the policy of different Indian states on the same. We shall share it with our partners***

## ***USDA Criticized by 2nd Judge over Genetic Crops***

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Biotech crop critics celebrated the second court ruling this month that the US Department of Agriculture acted improperly in advancing certain genetically altered crops, both of which are tied to biotech giant Monsanto Co.

"This is another nail in the coffin for USDA's hands-off approach to regulations on these risky engineered crops," Will Rostov, senior attorney for The Center for Food Safety, said in a statement.

*US District Court Judge Charles R. Breyer of the Northern District of California in San Francisco criticized the USDA on Tuesday as "cavalier" and said the department violated the law by failing to adequately assess possible environmental impacts before approving genetically engineered alfalfa developed by Monsanto.*

Roundup Ready Alfalfa allows growers to use Monsanto's Roundup herbicide to kill competing weeds without damaging the alfalfa, a key fodder crop.

A coalition of farmers, consumers, and environmentalists, led by the Center for Food Safety filed suit last year, alleging biotech alfalfa could create super weeds resistant to herbicide, hurt production of organic dairy and beef products, and could cause farmers to lose export business due to risks of contamination to natural and organic alfalfa.

The suit also alleged that contamination of conventionally grown alfalfa could force farmers to pay for Monsanto's patented gene technology whether they wanted it or not.

Alfalfa, a perennial plant cross-pollinated by bees and wind, is among the most widely grown crops in the United States, along with corn, soybeans, and wheat.

Judge Breyer said the parties in the case should propose remedies to him by Feb. 26. Rostov said the plaintiffs would ask the court for an injunction against future seed sales or plantings of the biotech alfalfa.

The defendants in the case are Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Administrator Ron Dehaven and Environmental Protection Agency administrator Steve Johnson.

Monsanto, which is not a named defendant, said it disagreed with the alfalfa finding.

"Monsanto stands behind the human health and environmental safety of Roundup Ready Alfalfa," spokeswoman Lori Fisher said. "Numerous regulatory agencies around the world, including Canada, have confirmed the environmental safety of Roundup Ready alfalfa. We are currently reviewing our legal options regarding this matter."

A spokeswoman for APHIS said the service was examining both court rulings. "We are very committed to protecting the environment and we do take compliance with environmental regulations seriously," said Rachel Iadicicco.

The ruling on alfalfa follows a Feb. 5 court ruling that was also critical of the USDA. That case involves field tests approved for bentgrass genetically modified to resist Monsanto's Roundup herbicide in a collaboration between Monsanto and The Scotts Co. Bentgrass is commonly used on lawns, athletic fields and golf courses.

US District Judge Henry Kennedy for the District of Columbia said there is "substantial evidence that the field tests may have had the potential to affect significantly the quality of the human environment." He said USDA could not process any further field test permits without conducting a more thorough review.

Kennedy said USDA's APHIS failed to adequately consider whether the field tests could harm the environment.

### **Hazard: Monsanto dumped toxic waste in UK**

*Evidence has emerged that the Monsanto chemical company paid contractors to dump thousands of tonnes of highly toxic waste in British landfill sites, knowing that their chemicals were liable to contaminate wildlife and people. Yesterday the Environment Agency said it had launched an inquiry after the chemicals were found to be polluting underground water supplies and the atmosphere 30 years after they were dumped.*

According to the agency it could cost up to £100m to clean up a site in south Wales that has been called "one of the most contaminated" in the country.

A previously unseen government report read by the Guardian shows that 67 chemicals, including Agent Orange derivatives, dioxins and PCBs which could have been made only by Monsanto, are leaking from one unlined porous quarry that was not authorized to take chemical wastes.

The Brofiscin quarry on the edge of the village of Groesfaen, near Cardiff, erupted in 2003, spilling fumes over the surrounding area, but the community has been told little about the real condition of what is in the pit. Yesterday the government was criticised for failing to publish information about the scale and exact nature of this contamination.

Douglas Gowan, a pollution consultant who produced the first official report into the Brofiscin quarry in 1972 after nine cows on a local farm died of poisoning, said: "The authorities have known about the situation for years, but have done nothing. There is evidence of not only negligence and utter incompetence, but cover-up, and the problem has grown unchecked."

Much of the new information about Monsanto's activities in Britain in the 1960s and early 1970s has emerged from court papers filed in the US and previously unseen internal company documents. They show how the company knew from 1965 onwards that the PCBs - polychlorinated biphenyls used mainly as flame retardants and insulators - manufactured in the US and at its plant in Newport, south Wales, under the trade name Aroclor, were accumulating in human milk, rivers, fish and seafood, wildlife and plants.

The documents show that in 1953, company chemists tested the PCB chemicals on rats and found that they killed more than 50% with medium-level doses. However, it continued to manufacture PCBs and dispose of the wastes in south Wales until 1977, more than a decade after evidence of widespread contamination of humans and the environment was beyond doubt.

A high-level committee within the company was given the task in 1968 of assessing Monsanto's options and reported contamination in human milk, fish, birds and wildlife from around the world, including Britain. "In the case of PCBs the company is faced with a barrage of adverse publicity ... it will be impossible to deny the presence and persistence of Aroclors. The public and legal pressures to eliminate or prevent global contamination are inevitable and probably cannot be contained successfully," the committee reported.

The report, which was shown to only 12 people, said: "The alternatives are [to] say and do nothing; create a smokescreen; immediately discontinue the manufacture of Aroclors; respond responsibly, admitting growing evidence of environmental contamination ..." A scrawled note at the end of the document says: "The Big Question! What do we tell our customers ... try to stay in business or help customers clean up their use?"

Monsanto stopped producing PCBs in the US in 1971, but the UK government, which knew of the dangers of PCBs in the environment in the 1960s, allowed their production in Wales until 1977.

Yesterday Monsanto, which has split into several corporate entities since 1997, said in a statement: "On behalf of [former parent company] Pharmacia Corp, Monsanto is handling issues related to the historical manufacture of PCBs in Wales. We continue to work with the Wales Department of Environment and other regulatory bodies to resolve these issues. A thorough review ... will show that Pharmacia did inform its contractors of the nature of wastes prior to disposal, and that Pharmacia did not dump wastes from its own vehicles."

Solutia, the spin-off from Monsanto which now owns the Newport site, said it was giving Monsanto and the regulatory agencies "information as requested".

The Environment Agency Wales said it was investigating the contents of the site: "This is one of the most contaminated sites in Wales and it is a priority to remediate because it is so close to habitations," said John Harrison, the agency's manager of the Taff/Ely region. "There is ground water pollution, but we do not think at present there is any danger to human health. We have spent about £800,000 so far investigating the tip. Our legal team is gathering all the evidence and we are trying to apportion costs."

<http://business.guardian.co.uk/story/0,,2011025,00.html>

## **GMOs in foods found in Kuwait, Qatar and UAE**

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Two Greenpeace activists have warned the public about the presence of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in products in retail outlets in Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, Arab Times reports.

Last December, Greenpeace commissioned the testing of 35 products sold in Kuwait, the UAE and Qatar. Freimueller said 40 per cent (14 products) tested positive for GMOs.

In Kuwait, 14 products were tested and three had GMOs. In Qatar and in the UAE four out of 10 samples and seven out of 11, respectively tested GE contaminated.

None of the GMO products were labelled, as Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE do not require labelling of such products.

Saudi Arabia enforced labelling laws five years ago.

Andi Freimueller and Arnaud Apoteker, both involved with Greenpeace's genetic engineering campaign, claimed that GMO traces could be found in corn-based food products imported by Kuwait.

*"Middle East consumers are likely to be eating GMO food, not tested for long-term health impacts, without knowing it."*

Greenpeace calls for a ban on GMOs, or at least for consumers to be given the right to choose by having GMO products labelled," they told a meeting organised by the Kuwait Journalists Association the Press.

Apoteker said, "Since labelling has been enforced in the EU, food companies have banned GMO ingredients from their products because European consumers refuse to buy GMO food. But such GMO products find their way to Middle East markets where consumers are either not aware or not told about the GMO content."

Genetic engineering is a technology that allows scientists to insert genes from one species into another that could not occur naturally.

For instance, fish genes in tomatoes and human genes in rice. GOMs can spread through nature and interbreed with natural organisms, contaminating non-GE crops and future generations and leading to biological pollution in an uncontrollable way. "GM foods are not a poison that kills instantly. The problem is that you are altering the genetic makeup of plants and you don't know if they have a long-term toxic effect. There is a lot of discussion on whether such foods can cause new allergies. Genetically engineered plants are resistant to herbicides, meaning herbicidal residues can reach our dining plates," Apoteker said

<http://www.bahraintribune.com/ArticleDetail.asp?CategoryId=2&ArticleId=139946>

## **Suppressed report shows cancer link to GM potatoes**

Campaigners against genetically modified crops in Britain last are calling for trials of GM potatoes this spring to be halted after releasing more evidence of links with cancers in laboratory rats.

UK Greenpeace activists said the findings, obtained from Russian trials after an eight-year court battle with the biotech industry, vindicated research by Dr Arpad Pusztai, whose work was criticised by the Royal Society and the Netherlands State Institute for Quality Control.

The disclosure last night of the Russian study on the GM Watch website led to calls for David Miliband, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, to withdraw permission for new trials on GM potatoes to go ahead at secret sites in the UK this spring. Alan Simpson, a Labour MP and green campaigner, said: "These trials should be stopped. The research backs up the work of Arpad Pusztai and it shows that he was the victim of a smear campaign by the biotech industry. There has been a cover-up over these findings and the Government should not be a party to that."

*Mr. Simpson said the findings, which showed that lab rats developed tumours, were released by anti-GM campaigners in Wales. Dr Pusztai and a colleague used potatoes that had been genetically modified to produce a protein, lectin. They found cell damage in the rats' stomachs, and in parts of their intestines.*

The research is likely to spark a fresh row about GM crops in Britain. Graham Thompson, a Greenpeace campaigner, said: "It is important because it backs up the research by Pusztai, which was smeared at the time by the industry."

Brian John of GM Free Cymru, who released the findings, said the research was conducted in 1998 by the Institute of Nutrition of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences and has been suppressed for eight years.

It showed that the potatoes did considerable damage to the rats' organs. Those in the "control groups" that were fed non-GM potatoes suffered ill-effects, but those fed GM potatoes suffered more serious organ and tissue damage.

The potatoes contained an antibiotic resistance marker gene. The institute that carried out the studies refused to release all the information. However, Greenpeace and other consumer groups mounted a protracted legal battle campaign to obtain the report. In May 2004 the Nikulinski District Court in Russia ruled that information relating to the safety of GM food should be open to the public.

The institute, however, refused to release the report. Greenpeace and Russian activist groups again took the institute to court, and won a ruling that the report must be released.

Irina Ermakova, a consultant for Greenpeace, said she had conducted her own animal feeding experiments with GM materials. "The GM potatoes were the most dangerous of the feeds used in the trials ... and on the basis of this evidence they cannot be used in the nourishment of people."

Greenpeace said the Russian trials were also badly flawed. Half of the rats in the trial died, and results were taken from those that survived, in breach of normal scientific practice.

[http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/health\\_medical/article2278044.ece](http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/health_medical/article2278044.ece)

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*This fortnightly bulletin is brought out by South Against Genetic Engineering (SAGE), a coalition of civil society activists, farmers, scientists, academicians, and consumer groups of four Southern States of India, viz., Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. SAGE has been waging a concerted battle against genetic engineering through a series of activities that involve public protests, media actions, seminars, consultations and publication of a series of education.*

*For details please contact:*

**South Against Genetic Engineering (SAGE)  
101, Kishan Residency, Street no: 5  
Begumpet, Hyderabad-500016, A.P.**

email: [sage.dds@gmail.com](mailto:sage.dds@gmail.com)