

# SOUTHERN ACTION ON GENETIC ENGINEERING

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April 8, 2011

Shri Kiran Kumar Reddy  
Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh  
Hyderabad

Dear *Shri Kiran Kumar Reddygaru,*

Today, on April 8<sup>th</sup>, millions across the globe are marching on the streets, are holding demonstrations and public meetings and showing protest in whatever way they can, on one slogan: **We don't want GMOs.**

Dear Sir, GMOs mean Genetically Modified Organisms, born out of a new technology called Genetic Engineering which changes the very DNA [the basic genetic structure] of our plants and alters their character totally. The one such GE plant widely cultivated in AP is Bt Cotton. Bt cotton was introduced in India saying that it will reduce cultivation costs, will use less pesticide sprays, will increase yields and bring more profits to the farmers. But studies done by independent people across AP, Maharashtra and Karnataka have proved that small farmers have received no benefit from Bt cotton. Their yields have reduced year after year, planting of Bt cotton has turned their soils more and more toxic, they are facing multiple health problems, and their cattle grazing on the Bt Stalk are dying.

Bt cotton came as an antidote to the suicide of cotton farmers. Now after nearly a decade of Bt cotton planting there is only an increase, not a decrease, in the number of farmers committing suicides.

Mr Reddygaru, please go through the testimonies of the farmers from our state in front of the three senior High Court judges from AP, Karnataka and Kerala and the Chief Justice of Orissa. These are eye opening personal stories from the very small farmers, women and men that expose the hidden harsh realities of Bt cotton. They have a lot of lessons for all of us.

For one thing, we must keep our ears alert to what small farmers, women and marginalized people are saying. We should not be swayed by the propaganda machinery that the multinational biotech industry has set in motion. It has billions of rupees to get its stories on the media, put out huge ads and buy a host of scientists to endorse their bad science. Mr Chief Minister, please beware of the argument that any skepticism expressed against Genetic Engineering is anti science. Hundreds of thousands of scientists across the world are confirmed in their belief that Genetic Engineering is a bad science and a poor untested, unsafe technology.

There is another very important fact that we wish to bring to your kind notice. This is the fact that one of the four South Indian states viz., Kerala has declared itself GM Free. This means that the government will not permit anyone to either grow or even initiate a field trial of G M crops. Karnataka has an established Organic Farming policy through its Savayava Mission and has put a substantial amount of money in its budget for the promotion of organic farming. In their current election manifestos, many political parties such as DMK, PMK have declared that they will work against GE agriculture. For some strange reason AP has fallen behind the trend. If organic farming is the future of South Indian states, we must immediately ban GE in our agriculture. Because genetically engineered agriculture and organic farming cannot coexist. GE crops are known to contaminate non GE crops and this is the greatest nightmare of organic farmers worldwide. Farmers in Canada, Mexico, Italy, France and Germany have repeatedly sued genetic engineering firms for contamination. This has been one of the reasons why the EU countries have banned genetic engineering in their farming.

Organic farming should be the future of our state. By being organic, we will all be able to eat good and safe food, keep our soils and our environment chemical free and healthy. In the interest of organic farming it is critical to ban genetic engineering.

Dear Mr Chief Minister, you must be surely aware of the unprecedented national debate last year on Bt Brinjal. This debate took place in the context of the attempt to introduce a genetically engineered Brinjal into the food and farming systems of this country. But an alert public opinion and a massive protest from farmers, environmentalists and enlightened scientists prevented this from happening. The Ministry of Environment and Forests declared a moratorium on testing Bt Brinjal in India. This was not only a great victory for the people and democracy of this country but also to a safe environment and health of our people

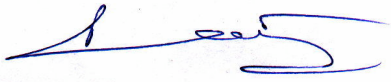
Another important point we would like to bring to your notice is that the Bt Cotton seeds are completely controlled by a U S based multinational agro-chemical corporation called Monsanto. Monsanto is also the company which wants to bring into India Bt Brinjal, Bt Bhindi, GE rice and a host of genetically engineered food crops. If it succeeds in its attempts in the name of a fake science, to introduce all these poison foods into our plates and poison crops onto our fields, what kind of a future will we have as farmers and consumers? It is unthinkable.

Therefore Chief Minister Sir, as our representative in our Assembly and as the Head of our Government in AP, we are certain that you will take serious interest in saving our health and our environment. Please help us:

1. Make our state GM free by bringing required legislations to ban genetic engineered crops in AP. This has already been done by Kerala government. There is no reason why you cant do it in our state. Bihar has shown the way how a determined Chief Minister can ask the centre to withdraw its permissions for GE. Agriculture is a state subject and there is no reason why we must feel vulnerable against a technocratic decision taken by the centre to permit GE on our soils
2. Since we in South India are the largest growers of Bt Cotton, we must review its performance through an open, transparent and public discussion. We request you to lead it.

3. Please advise the Members of Parliament from AP to block the introduction of the Bill on Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India. This Bill is not meant to regulate GE but to facilitate smooth passage of biotechnological products into our country. Let us initiate a very wide national debate bringing in small and marginal farmers, women, dalits, adivasis, environmentalists, concerned independent scientists into the debate on the issues of BRAI and then take a final call on it. We need not hurry through this bill. The health of India is far too valuable and important than the few million dollars of FDI that BRAI's passage might bring. And we should not play with this health of the nation.
4. Finally, please help to revitalize our state seed corporations and enforce their mandate to supply uncontaminated non Bt Cotton seeds to all farmers. You might be shocked to know that many state seed corporations have either stopped producing seeds or have got all their cotton seeds contaminated.

With green greetings



p v satheesh  
National Convenor  
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Hyderabad  
April 8, 2011