



Monthly Bulletin  
on Genetic Engineering  
April 2009

*For details:*

**South Against Genetic Engineering (SAGE)**

101, Kishan Residency, Street no: 5, Begumpet, Hyderabad- 500016, A.P.

email: [ddshyderabad@gmail.com](mailto:ddshyderabad@gmail.com)

net edition: [www.ddsindia.com](http://www.ddsindia.com)

## Contents

### *GE News India*

1. NO MORE TRANSGENIC TRIALS: Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth
2. GE crop not yet a foolproof technology, admits crop biotechnology body
3. After cotton, Brinjal up for a grab by Mahyco-Monsanto
4. 'Monsanto Quit India', say activists Protestors at TNAU, get arrested

### *Legal Issues*

5. SC seeks clarifications from Govt on GMO regulation.
6. Govt cracks down on two agencies for violating organic farming norms

### *GE Research Updates*

7. Cashing in on antioxidants- Industry hypes GM tomatoes
8. GE crops encourage stronger weeds- Scientists Warn

### *GE Around the World*

9. Germany to ban US biotech giant's genetically modified corn strain
10. Genetic 'magic bullet' cures have proven a 'false dawn'

## Ge News India

### **1. NO MORE TRANSGENIC TRIALS: Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth**

**Deccan Development Society, SAGE in collaboration with Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA), Aid India, Chetana Organic, organized a Brinjal festival in Hyderabad today (8th March 2009).**

Dr Rajaram Deshmukh, Vice Chancellor of Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth (MPKV, a State Agricultural University) promised an Inquiry Committee set up to look into a GM (Genetically Modified) corn trial of Monsanto in Kolhapur, that the University takes cognizance of the various concerns and queries being raised and would not undertake any more transgenic trials.

He assured the Inquiry Committee that the open air trial will be stopped soon and all material from the trial plot would be destroyed completely. The Inquiry Committee was set up after a protest rally and sit-in on Shaheed Diwas (March 23rd) by hundreds of farmers and consumers under the leadership of veteran farmers' leaders like N D Patil and Vijay Jawandhia, at the MPKV's Kolhapur "B Farm", against American MNC Monsanto's GM Corn trial being conducted there.

The Inquiry Committee pointed out that a majority of countries around the world do not allow GM crops/foods based due to sound scientific reasoning and agriculture scientists in India need to develop a healthy sense of questioning and skepticism about this technology rather than accept research trial orders from authorities in Delhi or some such place. The committee also observed that there is no functional State Biotechnology Coordination Committee (SBCC) or a District Level Committee (DLC) as laid down by the Environment Protection Act" to oversee the trial. Members of the Inquiry committee also posed very critical questions to the top brass of the University viz., Is this GM corn required in India and whether a need assessment has been taken up on the health and environmental

implications of GM corn as well as herbicide use etc.

Later, the Vice Chancellor told the Committee that he personally feels that herbicide tolerance technology might be suitable for large commercial farms in developed countries but not for small farmers in India. MPKV has become the first University in the state to announce that it will focus on other breeding technologies like Marker Assisted Selection rather than transgenics and to take a decision that they will not do any more transgenic trials.

### **2. GM crop not yet a foolproof technology, admits crop biotechnology body**

The All India Crop Biotechnology Association (AICBA), an industry association of the major companies engaged in agricultural biotechnology in the country, has admitted that the genetically modified (GM) crop is not a foolproof technology as yet. It is still at an evolving stage, according to the association.

R K Sinha, Executive Director, AICBA, who was in Ahmedabad on Wednesday, said, "The mealybug infestation on Bt Cotton in Gujarat clearly proves the same." Taking a cue, the Government has decided not to commercially introduce any GM vegetable (read Bt brinjal) unless the trials establish the crop's viability beyond doubt, he added.

### **3. After cotton, Brinjal up for a grab by Mahyco-Monsanto**

Having swamped the Indian cotton seed market with Bt cotton hybrids by sublicensing its Bt technology, Mahyco plans to tread the same path even with Bt brinjal to widen its presence as well as to monopolize the brinjal cultivation indirectly. Earlier, Mahyco has tied up with 23 Indian seed companies which control slightly over 60% of the Cotton seed market. All these seed companies are now completely immersed in Bt cotton seed production to realize their investments as quickly

as possible, leaving farmers no choice except to go for Bt cotton hybrids.

Besides in India, Mahyco is planning the same strategy in Bangladesh also. This technology has already been extended to Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute and a private seed company by name East West Seed.

Joint Director of Research at Mahyco Ms Usha Barwale Zehr, in her press conference claimed that, by taking to Bt brinjal, farmer can reduce their pesticide consumption by 70% in brinjal pest management. The company is also working on using Bt technology in other vegetables such as tomato, cabbage, cauliflower and okra, she said.

For further details, please log on to <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2009/04/15/stories/2009041550121000.htm>

#### **4. 'Monsanto Quit India', say activists Protestors at TNAU, get arrested**

The movement against Genetically Modified (GM) crops in Tamil Nadu took a dramatic turn on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2009, when a large number of protestors, led by Vellaiyan, the leader of Tamil Nadu Traders Association were arrested by the police for staging an active protest against the field trial of a GM corn plant inside the premises of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU).

The protestors, under the umbrella organization of the Safe Food Alliance had come together to demand immediate destruction of the field where trial of BT corn, a hazardous GM food crop developed by Monsanto within the university premise was being carried out in secrecy for the last 3 months.

Despite vehement criticism and possible health related implications surrounding GM crops that have been raised by activists, the TNAU has been conducting open air field trials for the multinational company Monsanto on the public land held by the university - free of cost. Earlier in March, the Safe Food Alliance had organised a rally against the continued allegiance of the University to the MNC Monsanto.

The protest carries a lot of significance to the fluid political situation in the State- as the 15th Lok Sabha Elections are fast approaching. Many parties, like the PMK- Pattali Makkal Katchi have taken a strong position against GM crops in the Manifesto. The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) had also been supporting the demand for gm free India and for a state ban in Tamil Nadu.

The SAFE FOOD ALLIANCE is a network of organisations and individuals who want to stop GM food from being approved as safe, from consumers and farmers losing a choice, from the nation losing its food security forever and for protecting the health and safety of citizens.

### **Legal Issues**

#### **5. SC seeks clarifications from Govt on GMO regulation.**

<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/sc-seeks-clarifications-from-govt-on-gmo-regulation/439464/>

New Delhi: India's apex court has sought clarifications from three Union ministries – agriculture, department of biotechnology (under ministry of science and technology) and environment and forests – about government's regu-

latory process for genetically modified (GM) crops and its implementation.

The special bench of the Supreme Court consisting of the Chief Justice, KG Balakrishnan, Justice Ashok Ganguly and Justice JM Panchal on Thursday in the course of the hearing acted on two rejoinders to the petition filed by the Convenor of the Gene Campaign, Suman Sahai in September 26, 2008 calling for a direct review of all the approvals for field trials

and commercialization of GM crops given by the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) and grant of moratorium on GM crop trials until proper regulatory processes were put in place.

The apex court also sought clarifications from US seed multinational, Monsanto's Indian Partner, Mahyco.

The Convenor of Gene Campaign, Suman Sahai alleged that the field trials of Mahyco's Bt rice in Jharkhand has violated all biosafety norms. There was a likelihood of genetic contamination of non-GM rice grown in the area. This was unfortunate as the eastern India along with Jharkhand was considered to be one of the centres of origin for rice, she said.

India's approval of GM crops had also raised eyebrows in the countries of its export destination. Russia for instance had imposed a temporary ban on Indian rice and sought clarification whether GM rice was exported.

### **The fresh update on the SC hearing on the two petitions on GM crops...**

<http://www.mynews.in/fullstory.aspx?storyid=18218>

Supreme court on Thursday directed the government to respond to the proposals for setting up of an independent laboratory for carrying out relevant health and bio-safety tests of genetically modified (GM) crops and formation of a committee to address the problems of regulation for ensuring safety of GM crops

The special bench of the Supreme Court observed that the government need to respond to the issues of health, environment and bio-safety raised in the two separate writ petitions – one filed by Aruna Rodrigues, PV Satheesh and Rajiv Baruah and the other by the Gene Campaign.

The next hearing of the case is slated in the last week of August, this year.

## **6. Govt cracks down on two agencies for violating organic farming norms**

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/Economy/Agriculture/Govt-cracks-down-on-two-agencies-for-violating-organic-farming-norms/articleshow/4407577.cms>

An accreditation agency under the commerce ministry has imposed penalties on two certification bodies for fraudulently certifying genetically modified, or Bt cotton as organic cotton.

National Accreditation Body (NAB), which oversees procedures for evaluation and accreditation of certification programmes, imposed a penalty of Rs 15 lakh on Mumbai-based Control Union Certifications (CUC) and Rs 7.5 lakh on Aurangabad-based Ecocert SA India.

According to the order, posted on the Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda) web site, these two bodies have committed serious non-conformities in violation of National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) norms relating to standards for organic production. Apeda carried out the investigation of certified cotton projects by these bodies in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra

According to APEDA, India produced around 3.9 lakh tonne of certified organic products which includes all varieties of food products like basmati rice, pulses, honey, tea, spices, cotton, garments, etc. India exported 86 items in 2007-08 with the total volume of 37,533 metric tonnes and cotton exports accounted for a major share. Organic products are mainly exported to the EU, the US, Australia, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, South Africa and the Middle East.

## GE Research Updates

### 7. Cashing in on antioxidants- Industry hypes GM tomatoes

<http://scienceblog.cancerresearchuk.org/2008/10/27/purple-tomatoes-wont-beat-cancer/>

Here is another case of misleading promotion by the Biotech companies that have developed a new variety GM tomato. It is a known fact that the antioxidants in the foods are important to and they play good role in neutralizing the free radicles and prevent cancer. Taking this cue about the advantages of antioxidants, the PR managers of the Biotech companies are striving hard to push a new variety of GM tomato which supposedly contains more antioxidants.

However, it is to be noted that, cancer is a complex disease that has lots of 'causes' - including the genes you inherit from your parents, the lifestyle you subsequently lead, and, sadly, a bit of bad luck too. The problem with the advertisement coverage of the super-tomato story is that it misses out on this complexity, and suggests that one single lifestyle change - buying high-tech fruit and veg - can cocompensate for all of the above.

Here's an excellent, well-argued article on (The antioxidant myth: a medical fairy tale

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg19125631.500-the-antioxidant-myth-a-medical-fairy-tale.html?page=1>) looking at the evidence for the role of antioxidants in health and disease. It's well worth a read before you pop to the shops to splash out on the latest health fad.

### 8. GE crops encourage stronger weeds- Scientists Warn

[http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/scientists\\_say\\_ge\\_crops\\_encourage\\_stronger\\_weeds](http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/scientists_say_ge_crops_encourage_stronger_weeds)

**Genetically engineered crops do little to improve yields and instead promote the proliferation of herbicide-resistant weeds that actually curb production, according to a study by the Union of Concerned Scientists.**

Corn and soybeans modified to resist insects and the herbicide glyphosate haven't been proven to boost yields, the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based group says in a 44-page report. The modified plants have increased the number of glyphosate-resistant weeds that compete for soil nutrients and moisture, reducing production, the group says.

## GE Around the World

### 9. Germany to ban US biotech giant's genetically modified corn strain

<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4176790,00.html>

Germany has decided to ban genetically modified corn, Agriculture Minister Ilse Aigner announced on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2009, amid concerns over its environmental and economical impact. Aigner announced a ban on the cultivation of MON 810 after considering a number of studies. MON 810 is the only strain which was approved for commercial use by European Union

in 1998, based on European Food Safety Authority's recommendation.

Incidentally, only last month, Germany, along with at least 20 other EU member states, voted down a European Commission attempt to have Austria and Hungary lift bans on growing maize.

Only four EU nations — Britain, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden — supported the Commission's effort to have the Austrian and Hungarian bans lifted.

## 10. Genetic 'magic bullet' cures have proven a 'false dawn'

Leading scientist Prof Steve Jones has claimed that the hope that genetic research could provide a cure for a host of common illnesses has proved a "false dawn".

Leading scientist Prof Steve Jones has claimed that the hope that genetic research could provide a cure for a host of common illnesses has proved a "false dawn".

Prof Jones, a geneticist and the head of the biology department at University College London, said, said the belief that a few genes held the key to ridding the world of conditions such as cancer and diabetes had proved to be "plain wrong".

Prof Jones opined that there had been "too much optimism" surrounding research into genes and that there was a danger it had become "largely unfounded". He even called for a complete overhaul of the "scattergun" approach to genetic research, which is backed by millions of pounds in funding by governments and medical charities. Even when scientists have identified genes linked to conditions such as diabetes and Crohn's disease they have discovered that they account for less than 10 per cent of inherited influence. In most cases, hundreds of genes are responsible, and often they have less effect than other factors such as diet, lifestyle and the environment. for full article, please log on to

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/scienceandtechnology/science/sciencenews/5190914/Genetic-magic-bullet-cures-have-proven-a-false-dawn.html>

**This monthly 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 educational materials.**