



Monthly Bulletin
on Genetic Engineering
April 2011

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Contents

SAGE in March:

NATIONAL:

Farmers from India narrate bitter Bt cotton tales
Nukes in favour, crops downgraded

GLOBAL:

Health: Potato Drags GM Food into Europe
GM tech part of solution to food security: Syngenta

GE & FOOD:

Shoppers kept in dark over GM ingredients
Major Canadian food processor says no to GM Enviropig

GE & AGRICULTURE:

Consider Bihar's concerns over Seeds Bill: Nitish
Farmers Sue USDA Over Monsanto Alfalfa - Again

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

Bt-maize reignites Jairam vs Pawar tiff

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-03-10/india/28676241_1_trials-of-bt-maize-field-trials-genetic-engineering-approval-committees

Noted Entomologist brings out book on Bt- cotton

<http://www.newkerala.com/news/world/fullnews-178502.html>

ICAR cautions Govt on anti-GM voices

www.thehindubusinessline.com/industry-and.../article1550958.ece

Biotechnology is politicized in India: Expert

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-03-21/hubli/29170866_1_biotechnology-sustainable-development-biodiversity

Activists, NGOs urge Prime Minister to withhold Biotechnology Regulatory Bill

<http://www.newkerala.com/news/world/fullnews-165206.html>

World consumer rights day

<http://epaper.sakshi.com/apnews/Anakapalle>

<http://epaper.sakshi.com/apnews/Details.aspx?id=835382&boxid=28850316>

Farmers from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra narrate bitter Bt cotton tales

Published: Monday, Mar 28, 2011, 8:29 IST

By Team DNA | Place: Bangalore | Agency: DNA

http://www.dnaindia.com/bangalore/report_farmers-from-karnataka-tamil-nadu-and-andhra-narrate-bitter-bt-cotton-tales_1525300

Judges' round table on genetic engineering

28 Mar 2011 ... The Round Table was held in *Bangalore* on March 26th and 27th. ... Their main contention was that *Bt cotton* had not given them economic ...

www.gmwatch.org/.../13007-judges-round-table-on-genetic-engineering -

29 Mar 2011 ... The *judges* also recognized the “emergence” of the following facts and ...
In the cultivation of *BT* cotton, it is found that there was large ...

foodfreedom.wordpress.com/.../emerging-jurisprudence-of-genetic-engineering-food-farming-and-bio-safety/ -

28 Mar 2011 ... **BANGALORE:** While making any legislation for regulatory bodies for ...
the judges observed that in India, *Bt cotton* was introduced with a ...

www.hindu.com/2011/03/28/stories/2011032859530400.htm -

SAGE in March 2011

Meeting Political Parties:

SAGE Tamil Nadu members met major political parties on March 8 and 9 and appraised them of the perils posed by GMO and GE. Sufficiently persuaded by the information provided by them, the ruling DMK party stated in its election manifesto that akin to the governments of Karnataka, Kerala and Uttaranchal, it too would take steps to resist the incursions of genetic modification techniques in its farm policy. It further affirmed that the party would encourage organic farming by providing special grants.

World Consumer Rights Day:

March 15 was observed as World Consumer Rights Day and SAGE took this opportunity to create awareness on GE and GMO foods throughout the four states: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Orissa.

Different programs were organized and a brochure entitled “**RIGHT TO SAY NO TO GMOs,**” with copies of its translation into local languages, was released as informative material. At Zaheerabad, **DDS** organized a meeting with new sangams (Kodadla Sangam) where the health hazards of GMO foods were explained, while laying out the specific instances of the damage done to soil and animal health by the Bt crops. Many informative posters were put up.

At Anakapally, **SVDS and SABALA** jointly organized a public meeting where the Joint Director of Agriculture, Visakhapatnam, the President, Visakha Consumer Counsel, and SAGE Visakha members spoke about ill effects of GMO foods. A Millet Seed Exhibition was also organized. At end of the day, the people took an oath that they would say no to GMO.

In Hyderabad, the **College of Home Science (ANGRAU) Department of Resource Management and Consume Science** observed the World Consumer Rights Day.. At the event the “**RIGHT TO SAY NO TO GMOs,**” brochures

were distributed in addition to the film show and interactive sessions

In Mysore, SAGE SAMVADA organized a one-day seminar on consumer rights and protection workshops, sponsored by the Department of Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution, Government of India. A group of 50 district-level food and civil supplies officers from Mysore, Kodagu and Chamaraja Nagar participated. At the seminar, the participants were acquainted with issues related to GE by SAGE SAMVADA, which also distributed “**RIGHT TO SAY NO TO GMOs,**” brochures and FAQs in Kanada. At Somani Sambhama College, a Consumer Awareness Exhibition was put up and a SAGE desk was set up to distribute GE literature to students and parents.

Judges roundtable March 26&27, 2011 Bangalore

Emerging Jurisprudence of Genetic Engineering: Food, Farming and Bio safety’. The round table for Judges was organised by the National Law School University of India (NLSUI), Bangalore, Southern Action of Genetic Engineering (SAGE), Hyderabad and Institute for Cultural Action (ICRA), Bangalore.

The High Court Judges who attended the Round Table were Mr. Justice Gopal Gowda, Chief Justice of Orissa High Court ; Mr. Justice Goda Raghuram Senior Judge from AP High Court ; Mr. Justice Thottathil B Radhakrishna from Kerala High Court; and Mr. Anand Byra Reddy from Karnataka High Court.

Eleven farmers from AP, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu made a series of submissions before the judges explaining the havoc wrought by Bt Cotton on their farms. Their main contention was that Bt cotton had not given them economic benefits. As a matter of fact, they had become poorer, their soils had become more toxic, their animals, grazing on Bt Cotton stalks, had either died or got sick, and in many cases had become infertile.

Besides the farmers who made these submissions, over 30 farmers and environmental activists from AP, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Orissa attended the

Round Table. Eminent legal luminaries such as Mr. Prashant Bhushan and Ms Shalini Bhutani along with the researchers from NLSIU Commons Cell made submissions on Biotechnology Regulation Authority of India Act, Seed Amendment Bill and other important national and international law which form the context for the biotechnology related laws

Padma Vibhushana Dr P M Bhargava, eminent scientist and founder Director of Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology [Hyderabad], Dr Yellappa Reddy of Karnataka, Dr Vijayan, eminent biologist and formerly Chair of the Kerala State Biodiversity Board and Dr Abdul Qayum, researcher of Bt Cotton from Hyderabad, raised concern over the GE threat and made their submissions.

The two-day roundtable concluded with a set of 15 *observations* from the panel of judges. Immediately after the round table, the media was addressed by Sri. P V Satheesh, Sri. P. Babu and Prof. K.Ramesh

Letters to Members of Rajya Saba and Loka Saba:

SAGE has emailed letters to all the MPs on the subject of “Introduction of Biotechnology Regulatory Authority Bill in the Parliament; will it save or destroy farming in India?” Along with this 4 page letter, the following documents were also emailed

- A letter addressed to Honourable Mr. Sharad Pawar dated April 26, 2010
- SAGE position documents on BRAI Bill
- BRAI Bill 2010: A Fast-tracking process to disenfranchise agricultural systems and traditional farming knowledge - SAGE Cabinet Approval Letter to Parliamentarians, October 2010

NATIONAL:

Farmers from India narrate bitter Bt cotton tales

Monday, 28 March 2011 15:42, **Farmers from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra narrate bitter Bt cotton tales** Daily News and Analysis (DNA) Mar 28, 2011 <http://bit.ly/fUNSQS>

The debate on genetically modified crops is gaining momentum again.

However, this time, it seems the engineered food is losing ground to traditional crops. Eleven farmers from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu made a series of submissions explaining the havoc wrought by Bt cotton on their farms.

Their main contention was that Bt cotton had not given them economic benefits.

As a matter of fact, they had become poorer, their soils had become more toxic, and their animals grazing on Bt cotton stalks had either died, or become sick.

“While making any legislation for regulatory bodies for genetic engineering in food and agriculture, the predominant factor should be the interest of the Indian society as consumers, farmers, and the Indian soil and other components of the environment,” said a panel of three eminent judges from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala and the chief justice of Orissa high court.

This decision came at the end of a round table of senior judges held for the first time in India to discuss the ‘Emerging Jurisprudence of Genetic Engineering: Food, Farming and Bio safety’.

The conference was organised by the National Law School University of India (NLSUI), Bangalore, Southern Action of Genetic Engineering (SAGE), Hyderabad and Institute for Cultural Action (ICRA), Bangalore. The two-day meet concluded on Sunday with a set of observations from the panel of judges. The observations included:

- BT cotton seeds were found to be good for an initial boost in production for one or

two years, after which there was consistent failure.

- Farmers were duped without adequate information on the identity and quality of cotton seeds.
- Large crop losses were noticed and pest attacks increased wherever there was BT cotton crop in the neighbourhood.
- Adverse health conditions were noticed in farmers including severe skin irritations and diseases.
- There was a rise in the mortality and infertility rates in cattle.

Nukes in favour, crops downgraded

Posted On Thursday, March 24, 2011

The Green Revolution was a publicly owned technology, but the current version is its opposite; processes, products, and research methodologies are caged in patents and the farmer has little say or control. But chasing nuclear stardom, India has once again sacrificed agriculture, writes Suman Sahai.

Mr George Bush announced from the historic Purana Qila that India and the United States will enter into an Indo-US Knowledge Initiative on Agricultural Research and Education. As the US president made it a point to emphasise, the initiative is to promote a 'Second Green Revolution' in India, which means promoting agriculture biotechnology, especially genetically engineered crops and foods. Agriculture biotechnology has been cleverly packaged as the 'Second Green Revolution' by its promoters, the life science corporations, in order to subliminally invoke the strong positive impressions that the political leadership in this country associates with the Green Revolution. In actual fact the two revolutions are about as different as chalk and cheese.

The Green Revolution was a publicly owned technology, belonging to the people. The research was conducted with public money to fulfil a public

need, overcome inadequate food production, and it created public goods to which everyone had access. There were no Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), no patents vested in multinational companies, no proprietary technologies or products. If there was ownership of the Green Revolution, it was vested in the farmer. Once the seed reached the farmers, it was theirs; they moved it where they wanted. Therefore despite its faults the Green Revolution addressed farmers needs, and India's food production showed an upward curve.

The Second Green Revolution is almost the exact opposite. It is a privately owned technology. Six corporations control practically the entire research and output in the field of transgenic plants. Processes and products, including research methodologies are shackled in patents and the farmer has no say, let alone any control. The technology creates only private goods that can be accessed only at significant cost. The seed belongs to the company, which strictly controls its movement.

In short, the particular Second Green Revolution being imagined has very little going for it; in twenty years these technologies have not yet produced a crop variety that has any direct connection to hunger and nutritional needs. But the Indo-US deal in agriculture endorses them, nevertheless.

The so called Knowledge Initiative has been prepared over the last several months in India, more or less with the Americans calling the shots. Despite the last minute red herring of Indian mangoes arriving in Washington this summer, the agriculture initiative is a one-sided affair from which India will gain little and give far too much. It is apparent that India has agreed to pay in the agriculture sector for the concessions that it has sought from the US in the nuclear field.

As always, it is the agriculture sector that finds itself being sacrificed in order to attain some nebulous goal framed in the context of national development. In the case of the GATT/WTO, the then Indian negotiators had no qualms accepting debilitating intellectual property rights regimes despite widespread national protests, to make some

theoretical gains in the textile sector which actually never materialised. But the willingness to sacrifice agriculture for gains in some other sector was part of national policy then and appears to be so today when we have paid for nuclear concessions with accepting an American agenda in agriculture. It is not out of place to emphasize a simple truth here, that food security is an integral part of national security. All India's efforts in the nuclear arena to shore up its national security goals will be undermined if it allows itself to become insecure in the matter of food.

The US government had made clear right from the beginning that it would not invest a single dollar in the initiative and that India would have to foot the entire bill. India has already committed that it will invest Rs.400 crores in the agriculture initiative. Out of this about Rs.300 crores will be used for genetic engineering and biotechnology products.

The Indian money will be used to pay for the visits of American scientists to India as well as for the visits of Indian scientists to the US.

GLOBAL

Health: Potato Drags GM Food into Europe

By David Cronin (brussels) Friday, March 05, 2010 Inter Press Service

Genetically modified (GM) foods appear to be back on the European Union's political menu - thanks to a potato.

Manufactured by the German chemical firm BASF, a potato named Amflora became the first GM crop to be authorised for cultivation by the EU's executive arm, the European Commission, in 12 years Mar. 2.

It is unlikely that the same length of time will elapse before the next such approval is granted by Brussels officials. Files relating to 17 other GM crops - including varieties of maize, oilseed rape and more potatoes - are on those officials' desk and awaiting a formal rubber-stamp.

Although many of the EU's governments are opposed to the introduction of GM foods, the Commission's most powerful representatives have long been eager to resume the approval of new varieties. Last year, it sought unsuccessfully to force France and Greece to ditch moratoria they had placed on the planting of Mon-810, a corn variety developed by the American multinational Monsanto.

EuropaBio, a group representing the biotechnology industry, notes that some of the crops under consideration in Brussels have been grown in North

America for nearly two decades. Willy de Greef, the group's secretary-general, said that food safety authorities have 'thoroughly assessed' GM crops and found them to pose no threat. 'But this has never stopped some of the anti-GM activists from selling the same old story,' he told IPS.

BASF, for its part, has wasted no time in announcing that it has developed other types of potatoes, including one resistant to the type of blight widely assumed to have caused a famine that killed one million Irish people - one eighth of the country's inhabitants - in the 19th century.

Claims that GM foods have been scientifically verified as safe and could cure global hunger will be familiar to anyone who has followed the often-heated debate about their effects. The cosy relationship between the scientists happy to give their blessing to these foods and the corporations that have invested heavily in them is not as well known.

Amflora's approval followed a positive opinion from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in Parma, Italy. Since its inception in 2002, the authority has delivered more than 40 assessments on genetically modified organisms (GMOs), all of them favourable. Its panel on GMOs is chaired by Harry Kuiper, a Dutchman who previously coordinated a scientific research programme involving three leading biotech firms Bayer, Monsanto and Syngenta.

Greenpeace agriculture campaigner Marco Contiero complains that 18 of the 21 scientists tasked by EFSA with analysing applications to plant GM foods are biochemists ‘with only one or two experts on the environment.’

‘If we talk about releasing living organisms into the environment, we must have the advice of scientists who know about this,’ he added. ‘The problem we have with EFSA is that it doesn’t have the means to carry out risk assessments or independent analysis of data submitted by companies.’

In relying on EFSA’s counsel, the European Commission has glossed over contradictory information provided by other authorities. The World Health Organisation and the European Medicines Evaluation Agency have both expressed concerns about issues related to Amflora, which contains a gene resistant to some antibiotics.

While the potato’s starch is intended for industrial use - such as in glue manufacturing - biotech firms admit that its by-products are likely to be used for animal feed and could therefore enter the human food chain. Policy-makers on public health have warned that planting antibiotic resistant crops could undermine the effectiveness of several medicines deemed vital in treating diseases that affect humans.

The stakes could be particularly high in the case of Amflora, as it is designed to be resistant to neomycine and kanamycine, two drugs used to treat tuberculosis. Across the world 2 billion people are infected with TB, which takes 2 million lives per year. Yet John Dalli, the EU’s new commissioner for public health has defended his authorisation of Amflora. He told the TV channel Euronews that that the likelihood of the potato harming efforts to cut TB deaths is ‘so remote that the assessment is there is no danger at all to human life.’

Contiero, however, dismissed claims that GM foods will ultimately benefit humanity, as ‘propaganda’. Far from offering the possibility

of wonder foods that will make hunger history, biotech firms are intricately linked to an industrialised system of agriculture that helps exacerbate hardship.

‘Monsanto owns 90 percent of GMOs in the world,’ he said. ‘And together with Bayer and Syngenta, it owns almost 50 percent of all seeds. The fact is that three companies - Bayer, BASF and Pioneer - also own 65 percent of the pesticide market. Biotech companies buy seed companies because this gives them a direct control of food production and food prices. Decision-makers should look very seriously at how they control food prices. This is an issue that people tend to forget.’

Original source: Inter Press Service

www.ipsnews.net/news

GM tech part of solution to food security: Syngenta

PTI New Delhi, March 3:

Identifying Genetically Modified (GM) technology as crucial to achieve food security, seeds and pesticide manufacturer Syngenta on Thursday said it is working closely with Indian research organisations to develop GM corn, rice and vegetables seeds.

“GM technology in seeds is a part of the solutions to attain food security and we are working with Indian research institutions on corn, rice and vegetables,” Syngenta Asia Pacific Corporate Affairs Head Andrew McConville told reporters here.

Stating that for the company India is important along with other emerging economies such as Brazil, Russia and China (BRIC countries), Mr McConville said “We are working in collaboration with ICAR and Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), especially in the field of rice.”

Syngenta has a global turnover of around \$11.6 billion. It has major presence in 14 countries, particularly in Europe.

Asked about widespread protests over BT Brinjal and other GM crops in India on medical grounds,

Mr McConville said “farmers should be given a choice to go for an agricultural practice best suited to them”.

Laying emphasis on the latest bio—tech practices, he said, “More than 25 countries are using GM

crop technology. GM corn is very successful in Phillipines...India should not shut its eyes to the technology,” McConville said.

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/>

GE FOOD

Shoppers kept in dark over GM ingredients

Millions of Britons are unwittingly eating food made using genetically modified soy, a survey of the leading grocery brands has disclosed.

More than three million tons of soy is imported into Britain every year, a large proportion of which is GM

*By Louise Gray, Environment Correspondent
7:45AM GMT 21 Mar 2011*

Household name brands like Cadbury Dairy Milk and Bird’s Eye use milk, eggs and meat made from animals that could have been fed GM soy, the research shows.

The Daily Telegraph has already revealed that all supermarkets routinely sell food from animals reared on GM crops. Michael Meacher, the former Labour environment minister, said there have not been enough studies carried out on the health implications of meat and dairy from animals fed GM soy.

He said food should be labelled if GM animal feed is used. “This is a significant health and environmental issue and people are entitled to know, not have it foisted upon them.”

Caroline Lucas, the Green MP, said a recent ruling in Brussels means that shipments of GM contaminated with unauthorised seeds could be allowed into the EU. This means that GM that has not been safety tested in Europe could end up in the UK food chain. “This is a slippery slope, allowing crops that have not been given safety approvals to enter our food chain,” she said. There

is also 150,000 tonnes of GM soy oil sold in Britain every year, mostly used in fast food restaurants.

Caterers are supposed to tell customers if soy is used but over the past five years Trading Standards have cracked down on hundreds of hotels and pubs found to be breaking the law. Kirtana Chandrasekaran, of Friends of the Earth, said rainforest is being cleared to make way for GM soy plantations. The intensively farmed crops also rely on liberal use of pesticides, which can cause problems for the surrounding community. In Paraguay there have been reports of adults and children made ill and even killed by the growing use of pesticides.

“There’s a chain of destruction linking soy fields flooded with pesticides to the UK’s factory farms which are polluting our countryside and giving us unhealthy food,” she said. “The only winners are companies that produce pesticides and sell us dodgy meat.”The Government can change this as part of it’s ongoing overhaul of farming subsidies - millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money is currently spent on factory farming here in the UK. “This money must be used to help UK farmers move away from imported soy animal feed towards healthy, planet -friendly meat and dairy.”Shoppers kept in dark over GM ingredients - Telegraph.mht

Major Canadian food processor says no to GM Enviropig

Friday, 25 March 2011 19:23 **Processor says no to Enviropig**

A Quebec pork processor assures environmental groups that it won’t use a genetically modified pig designed to be environmentally friendly even if it’s eventually approved by Health Canada

by SUSAN MANN © AgMedia Inc. Better Farming March 22, 2011
<http://bit.ly/eUWfl1>

If Enviropig starts being produced on pig farms here one major Canadian pork processor says it isn't interested in processing meat from the genetically modified animals.

In a March 1 letter to two representatives from groups critical of Enviropig, Rejean Nadeau, president and CEO of Olymel, says his company doesn't intend to market pork meat from genetically modified pigs either nationally or internationally. "Also Olymel supports mandatory labelling of products derived from genetically modified pigs."

Enviropig hasn't been approved by Health Canada for human consumption but its developers at the University of Guelph applied two years ago to have it assessed.

Nadeau made his comments in response to letters from Lucy Sharrat of Canadian Biotechnology Action Network and Cathy Holtslander of Saskatoon-based Beyond Factory Farming, a national organization promoting socially responsible livestock production in Canada. The network campaigns for food sovereignty and environmental justice.

Keith Robbins, Ontario Pork spokesman, says he won't comment on a processor's statement. The genetically modified pig, trade named Enviropig, was developed by University of Guelph researchers and is designed to reduce phosphorus pollution of surface and ground water and farmers' feed costs. Enviropig excretes less phosphorous manure, which proponents argue makes it a more environmentally type of pig

University of Guelph spokesperson Lori Bona Hunt says in an email the university has applications into federal agencies in the United States and Health Canada to assess Enviropig for human food and animal feed. The applications are "currently under review and it is not known when or even if they will be completed."

The application to Health Canada was submitted on April 23, 2009, she says, noting the application doesn't have a mandatory or acknowledged deadline for a decision.

Another group concerned about the possible approval of Enviropig for production in Canada is the National Farmers Union. Earlier this month, Sean McGivern, the union's Ontario coordinator, made a presentation to Ontario Pork's board and senior staff. He told them Enviropig isn't the answer to surface and ground water pollution but that good farm management is.

McGivern says the real cause of phosphorous pollution in water is the concentration of hog confinement facilities and the number of animals in them and not the pigs themselves. "If people really have a phosphorous problem they can feed a phytase supplement at less than 50 cents a hog," he says.

Robbins says Ontario Pork received the information from the NFU and appreciates that's their position but "we're also looking at it in the broad perspective of looking at ways to improve life and improve quality and improve the process and that would include aspects of challenging those norms especially in the environmental area." Over 10 years, Ontario Pork contributed \$1.2 million for research into developing Enviropig. Robbins says Ontario Pork doesn't have a stance on Enviropig. It's just one of the many research projects the organization has funded over the years. "We're looking at it as potential solution to a potential problem that was existing," Robbins says, noting they still consider Enviropig as a potential option to reduce farmers' feed costs.

The groups critical of Enviropig are asking the university, Ontario Pork and Health Canada to stop the approval process. McGivern says if Enviropig is approved they're concerned the Ontario industry will lose export markets because consumers both domestically and internationally won't accept genetically modified pork.

"Even if it's released in a controlled environment, which we don't believe is really possible, we're

still going to be painted with the brush that all Canadian pork is genetically engineered," he says. The next step for the groups is to hold

meetings during the next two months with the chairs of Canada's national food retail chains, McGivern says.

GE AGRICULTURE

Consider Bihar's concerns over Seeds Bill: Nitish

By Gargi Parsai www.thehindubusinessline.com

The bill will lead to unrestricted commercialisation of varieties in public domain' After raising objections to the permission given by the Centre for trials of Bt Maize in his State, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has now urged Prime Minister Manmohan Singh not to pass the Seeds Bill in Parliament without taking into consideration the views and concerns of Bihar.

Mr. Kumar drew Dr. Singh's attention to the letter he wrote recently to Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar in which he asserted that the bill in its present form would lead to unrestricted commercialisation of varieties in the public domain, including farmers' varieties.

"The proposed bill is not only anti-farmer but also brazenly favours multinationals in the garb of higher productivity. Any attempt to pass the bill in its present form will irrevocably damage Indian agriculture and make the goal of food security a distant dream," Mr. Kumar said.

'Cost is relevant'

Since the objective of the bill was to provide quality seeds, quality could not be divorced from cost. "The bill may, in fact, lose meaning if seeds are not available to farmers at affordable prices. With private companies, particularly multinationals, joining the field, cost becomes relevant. Our experience with private seed companies producing hybrid maize seeds underscores this," he said.

Last year, the Bihar government had to give about Rs.61 crore as compensation to maize farmers when the private hybrid seed failed to form grain.

"The problem of the non-setting of grains was not observed in public sector hybrids. This led to great distress among farmers, but they disowned their responsibility," Mr. Kumar said, having brought this to the notice of Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh in a separate letter.

'Lay down safeguards'

"Our concern about rushing into the use of genetically modified [GM] crops without adequate safeguards is well-known. The proposed bill should lay down these safeguards explicitly. GM seeds should be registered only after extensive research to address concerns like adverse effects on biodiversity, ecology and human health, with dissemination of findings in the public domain. Seed imports should be allowed only after pest risk analysis and local adaptability assessment. There is a need for a Liability Clause to be introduced that makes seed exporters responsible for any pest outbreak and clean-up operations," Mr. Kumar said.

He said that while public sector seeds were affordable, "the cost of private seeds runs into hundreds of rupees or even several thousands, in case of hybrid vegetable seeds." Besides, the provision of re-registration would increase the monopoly of seed companies for at least 20 years, he said, adding that the government should take responsibility for seed certification.

Compensation

Lamenting that no criterion had been laid for determining compensation to farmers for seed failure, Mr. Kumar said it should be fixed at the difference between the value of expected produce as per the seed producer's claim and the actual produce.

He said there should be a time-limit for payment of compensation, and that the definition of farmers

— as described in the National Commission on Farmers — should include landless farmers cultivating leasehold lands.

“The onus of paying compensation should be determined clearly and stated in the bill,” he said, adding that the penalties proposed in the bill were “trivial.”

Role of States

Raising the issue of agriculture being a State subject, Mr. Kumar demanded a wider role for States in regulation.

“State governments should have the authority through the bill to fix the retail seed price and royalty charges. This is in light of the fact that apart from spurious seeds, it is also the high market price of seeds that contributes to the complex situation of the current agrarian distress, which results in farmers’ suicides,” he said.

Mr. Kumar wanted all the powers of the Seeds Control Order of 1983— which will get nullified once the Seeds Bill is passed — to be incorporated in the proposed bill.

Farmers Sue USDA Over Monsanto Alfalfa - Again

Friday 25 March 2011,

By: *Mike Ludwig, t r u t h o u t | Report*
www.truth-out.org

A flowering alfalfa plant. (Photo: [Jenn Forman Orth / Flickr](#)) A coalition of farmers and environmental groups filed a lawsuit against the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on March 18 to challenge the agency’s recent decision to fully deregulate Monsanto’s Roundup Ready alfalfa.

This is the second time the USDA has been sued over its approval of Roundup Ready alfalfa, which is genetically engineered (GE) to tolerate glyphosate, a popular herbicide commonly sold under the Monsanto brand name Roundup. The latest lawsuit, filed by groups like the Center for Food Safety (CFS) and the National Family Farm

Coalition, opens a new chapter in the five-year battle over the GE alfalfa seed developed by Monsanto and Forage Genetics.

Industry watchdogs and farmers say that Roundup Ready alfalfa will increase reliance on already overused herbicides like Roundup, encourage the spread of herbicide-resistant “superweeds” and contaminate organic and conventional alfalfa with Monsanto transgenes through cross-pollination.

About 93 percent of the alfalfa planted in the US is grown without herbicides, but up to 23 million more pounds of herbicide could be sprayed annually following the introduction of Roundup Ready alfalfa into America’s fields, according to USDA estimates.

Alfalfa is not just grown for human consumption. Alfalfa seed and hay feed dairy cows and other livestock, and the growing organic food industry is concerned that cross-contamination of transgenes could threaten the production of organic meat and milk. The USDA, however, recently concluded that Roundup Ready alfalfa does not pose a significant “plant pest risk” despite evidence that transgenes from the alfalfa have contaminated conventional alfalfa in the past.

The USDA first deregulated Roundup Ready alfalfa in 2005. Internal emails recently obtained by Truthout show that Monsanto worked closely with regulators to edit its original petition to deregulate the alfalfa. One regulator accepted Monsanto’s help in conducting the USDA’s original environmental assessment of the alfalfa.

Farmers and biotech opponents soon filed a lawsuit against the USDA to challenge the initial deregulation. In 2007, a federal court ruled that the USDA did not consider the full environmental impacts of Roundup Ready alfalfa and vacated the agency’s decision to deregulate the alfalfa. Monsanto and its allies appealed the decision, and last year, the Supreme Court reversed the lower court’s ruling, but ordered the USDA to produce an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the alfalfa before allowing it back into America’s fields.

The USDA released a final EIS on Roundup Ready alfalfa in late 2010, and the GE alfalfa was fully deregulated on January 27. The USDA went on to approve two more GE seeds within weeks of the alfalfa decision.

Roundup Ready alfalfa was deregulated just weeks after USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack was pressed by Republican Congressmen, some of whom recently received campaign contributions from Monsanto and the biotech industry, to dump a proposal to geographically isolate Roundup Ready alfalfa from organic and conventional alfalfa and, instead, legalize the GE seed without any government oversight.

The latest lawsuit filed by CFS and its allies argues that the final EIS ignores or downplays the threats Roundup Ready alfalfa poses to conventional alfalfa farms and the environment.

“USDA’s review is inaccurate and completely failed to consider critical issues,” said plaintiff farmer Phil Geertson of the family-owned Geertson Seed Farms company. “The decision to deregulate Roundup Ready alfalfa opens the door to widespread transgenic contamination, costing farmers their markets, reputation and ability to grow natural varieties.” The USDA, however, contends that Monsanto’s transgenic alfalfa is just as safe as the alfalfa that the Geertson family has grown for decades.

This monthly bulletin is brought out by Southern Action on 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 Orissa. 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.