



Monthly Bulletin  
on Genetic Engineering  
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*For details:*

**South Against Genetic Engineering (SAGE)**

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## National News : GM & Health

### 1. Vidarbha in dire straits!

<http://vidarbhanandolansamiti.blogspot.com/>

**Nagpur** - Vidarbha is staring at the worst ever drought this year with an unprecedented short fall in monsoon rain, pest epidemic destroying standing crop and steep decline in ground water level as the four-month (June-September) monsoon is the main source of water for irrigation in the country.

Nature seems to have turned against Vidarbha this year as with half of the kharif season over, the region has received less than 40% of the normal rainfall. If it does not rain in good measure in next five days, it could lead to a drought in the region. The situation is worse in western Vidarbha, a mainly cotton and soyabean growing area, which received a meagre 35% of the average rainfall this monsoon in the already distressed, farmers' suicide-hit Amravati division as well in eastern Vidarbha's Nagpur division for want of rains, sowing could take place in less than 80 per cent of the total cultivable land. Vidarbha Janandolan Samiti (VJAS), in a letter addressed to Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, has urged him to send a team of experts to make spot assessment of the emerging severe drought-like condition in farm suicide hit Vidarbha.

The hard times going forward have elicited the following comments:

**Aruna Rodrigues:** The sown cotton crop must be Bt cotton and this is a rain fed area. Bt is a cash crop usually requiring large amounts of water through irrigation. If the rain plays spoil sport, the fate of these farmers will be absolutely terrible. Kishore, they should stop planting Bt.

**Kishore Tiwari of Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti:** You are absolutely right. Now in Maharashtra thanks to state owned promotion Bt cotton has already crossed 3.2 million hectares, covering West Vidarbha, East Vidarbha, Marathwada, North Maharashtra and Khandesh, and 80% of this area is rain fed and the condition of the

crop can be seen here in the photos.

<http://vidarbhanandolansamiti.blogspot.com/>

The days are not far away that once again the Maharashtra Govt. is likely to announce compensation for Bt. cotton failure as happened in December 2005. You are right farmers should stop planting Bt cotton seed but it's a fact that there is no option left for cotton growers of the region [ie only Bt cotton is being promoted and made available].

### 2. India's 'drought-resistant non-GM Rice'

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/8182840.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/8182840.stm)

**Hazaribag, Jharkhand** - A new variety of non-GM rice being tested in the fields of India's eastern Jharkhand state has the potential to change the face of Indian agriculture.

Sahbhagi dhan is drought-tolerant and can survive even if there are no rains for 12 days.

Rice is known to be a "thirsty crop" and a "water guzzler" and scientists have been working for years to develop a strain which will withstand a dry spell.

Monsoons are at best erratic in Jharkhand, and the scanty rainfall this year has given rise to a drought-like situation in many parts of the state which is bad news for rice growers.

"It's a very challenging year. We're dependent on the monsoon completely. We've already lost 60 percent of our crop because of poor rainfall. If the rains come now, we would be able to take 30-35 percent of our paddy crop," says farmer Bijay Kumar Singh.

For farmers like him, Sahbhagi could be the answer to prayers. Dr VD Shukla of CRURRS says Sahbhagi Dhan has "the capacity to take moisture from the deeper levels of soil. It is also tolerant to diseases and pests. Moreover, its stem is much more sturdy and doesn't bend, which means the farmer gets a better yield".

Adds Mr Variar: "Last year, the crop season was good with well distributed rainfall. But this year there are drought-like conditions so the farmer will be able to differentiate between the Sahbhagi and other varieties and find out which one is better."

The farmers agree. Says Gulab Mahato of Lupung village, "There's no water even in the village pond this year. So how do we sow our crops? But with Sahbhagi, we can wait for another 15 days. Even if it rains a little bit, we will be able to get some rice."

### 3. Mealybug menace on the rise!

[http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/mealybug\\_menace\\_affects\\_bt\\_cotton\\_farming\\_amreli](http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/mealybug_menace_affects_bt_cotton_farming_amreli)  
<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/Mealybug-species—the-Bt-cotton-killer—is-exotic—Experts/490540>

**Making a case of large-scale Mealybug infestations damaging their Bt Cotton produce, farmers of Amreli district have approached the district administration to adopt measures for preventing the spread of the menace that has been on the rise for the last two years.**

Jitendra Dabhi, District Agriculture Officer, Panchayat Department, Amreli, who had visited the infected crops on the request of the farmers few days ago, said: "Nearly 2,63,000 hectares of land in Amreli is under Bt Cotton, of which almost 10 per cent is infested with pests like Mealybug and Aphids. Pesticides

Meanwhile, the All India Crop Biotechnology Association (AICBA), an industry association of the major companies engaged in agricultural bio-technology in India, continues to deny that there is any relation between Bt Cotton and pests like Mealybug.

Sajiv Anand, Director, AICBA, said: "Bt Cotton has not brought pests like Mealybug. These have always been there. There is no relation between Bt Cotton and Mealybug." Anand was in Ahmedabad recently.

R S Phogat, Head of Department, Biotechnology, Anand Agriculture University, echoed Anand's views while downplaying the opposition to genetically modified crops. Controlling this pest is one of the biggest challenges faced by the agriculture scientists of the country for the past four years.

When a group of scientists at the Central Institute for Cotton Research (CICR) here, led by V S Nagrale, conducted a thorough molecular study of the deadly pest, they concluded in December 2008 that the mealybug specie was an exotic (alien) pest that was originally noticed in America. There were, however, not many takers for this.

But a recent paper by Aligarh Muslim University taxonomist (an expert in identification of species) Mohammad Hayat, too, has confirmed the finding. The paper is already online on the prestigious Biosystematica journal published from the US.

## *GE issues around the World*

### 4. Monsanto named in 50 cancer lawsuits

<http://www.wvrecord.com/news/220565-monsanto-named-in-50-cancer-lawsuits>

**WINFIELD** - Fifty recently filed lawsuits allege Monsanto and related companies are responsible for causing cancer.

Each of the complaints, filed Aug. 3 in Putnam Circuit Court, say Monsanto and its successor companies caused cancer by exposing the plaintiffs to dioxins/furans contamination of the

air and property in and around Nitro. The cases mention the "negligent and otherwise unlawful release of dioxin from defendants' waste disposal practices on properties located in and about Nitro, West Virginia." air.

The plaintiffs say their property and soil was contaminated. The complaints say the defendants knew of the dangers.

The defendants "should have known of the highly toxic properties of dioxin and that dioxin was and is a known promoter of cancer and

that dioxin was and is a known human carcinogen,” the complaints state. The defendants “knew that the area around the Monsanto plant was populated with permanent residents who would likely live out their lives in the area contaminated.”

The complaints also detail the history of Monsanto and the company’s knowledge regarding dioxin. The Nitro plant produced herbicides, rubber products and other chemicals, including Agent Orange.

Monsanto owned and operated the plant from 1934 to 2000. From 1949 to 1970, the company produced an herbicide that was heavily contaminated with dibenzo dioxins and dibenzo furans. The complaints say the company disposed of the dioxin-contaminated waste in a way which caused dioxins to escape into the air. Dioxin has been linked to cancer, birth defects, learning disabilities, endometriosis, infertility and suppressed immune functions.

The plaintiffs seek compensatory damages for medical bills past and future, lost wages, pain and suffering, mental anguish and loss of enjoyment of life. They also seek punitive damages for the “willful, wanton and reckless” actions of the defendants “evidencing a callous disregard for the health and wellbeing of the residents of the Nitro area.”

## 5. Checking GM Foods Down Under

[http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/regulation\\_gm\\_foods\\_australia](http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/regulation_gm_foods_australia)  
<http://www.youtube.com/thinkingaustralia>

**Australia’s food standards regulator has released an outline of a review report into regulation of genetically modified (GM) foods in Australia. The review was commissioned by FSANZ. (Food Standards Australia New Zealand)**

The report provided comparison of the current FSANZ approach to GM food safety assessments against international best practice in the area. It identified a number of strengths in the FSANZ approach to GM food

safety assessments including the knowledge of scientific staff who assess GM food in the country; transparency of assessments; education of relevant stakeholders; and a strong international input.

## 6. Call for labeling GM Foods

<http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/ylki>

**The Indonesian Consumers Foundation (YLKI) says it is high time for the government to require genetically modified products to be labeled, as it is the public’s rights to know what they are consuming.**

“The consumer protection law guarantees consumers the right to information on all products or services. If the public knows whether a product is genetically modified, they can make an informed decision,” YLKI researcher Ilyani S Andang said Wednesday.

The call for labeling was first sounded nine years ago, but the government has never responded in a significant way.

## 7. EU buyers stop US soy imports!

<http://news.alibaba.com/article/detail/agriculture/100150870-1-update-2-eu-buyers-stop-us.html>

[http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/us\\_crop\\_blocked\\_germany](http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/us_crop_blocked_germany)

**MADRID/WASHINGTON** - European Union buyers have voluntarily moved to stop imports of U.S. soy after shipments were found containing traces of genetically modified corn, a spokesman for the EU in Washington said on Thursday.

European trade sources said U.S. soybean meal shipments to Spain and Germany were found with traces of GMO corn, which is prohibited in the European Union.

“The industry has itself decided to stop all imports of U.S. soy, as of now,” Mattias Sundholm, Deputy Spokesman for the European Commission Delegation to the US, told Reuters.

“The shipments have been rejected at the EU

borders, and have been consigned and recalled when already on the market within the EU, unless they have already been consumed," Sundholm said. Recently, boatloads of soya meal from the US were rejected by German authorities due to traces of a GM maize protein. Spanish authorities have also blocked shipments. The problem is not the GM soya but the maize which is still awaiting EU approval.

The contamination is understood to have come from dust within the portside stores and handling systems, making it virtually impossible to prevent.

The US Grain and Feed Trade Association estimates that around 200,000 tonnes of US soya had been denied entry to the EU by mid July. Given the uncertainty, international traders have ceased all further shipments.

## 8. Chickens turn smart!

<http://www.ioi.co.za/index.php?setid=1&catid=143&articleid=20090802102554511C805624>

Chickens refusing to eat the maize they had been fed has led to the discovery that their feed had been genetically modified to include a well-known weed and insect killer.

Strilli Oppenheimer was recently approached by Dawid Klopper, the head gardener at the family estate, Brenthurst, informing her that her indigenous African chickens were refusing to eat the mealies in the chicken feed bought from a large supplier. Concerned that the birds may be ingesting genetically modified maize, she instructed Klopper to have the maize tested.

The chickens' diet was immediately changed to include organic vegetables, Oppenheimer stopped consuming the home-grown eggs and the maize was sent to the GMO testing facility at the University of the Free State for analysis.

The results confirmed Oppenheimer's initial suspicion - the maize had been genetically engineered to produce proteins that are toxic to certain insects and weeds.

"This is of serious concern. Do you know that 96 percent of soya-based foods are genetically modified and that maize in South Africa is contaminated," asked Oppenheimer, pointing out that research by well-known scientist Dr Arpad Pusztai had shown that rats fed on GM potatoes suffered from a weakened immune system and stunted growth of their internal organs, including the liver, kidneys and brain.

Pusztai was fired by the Rowett Research Institute in the UK in 1998 after his research into the human nutritional consequences of GM. His findings had far-reaching implications for the biotech industry, which had contended that GM crops and products would not adversely affect human health.

International research has shown a direct link between certain types of genetic engineering and cancer.

About her chickens' refusal to eat their maize, Oppenheimer said: "They're smart."

## 9. Doctors join GM foods protest

Jodie Thomson

<http://www.thewest.com.au/default.aspx?MenuID=146&ContentID=160539>

A group of Margaret River doctors including GP Dr Allan Walley have presented a petition to the local shire council urging them to remain GM free.

The petition, with the signatures of seven local medical practitioners, has been handed to Augusta-Margaret River councilors, stating they were "sufficiently concerned about the health risks to humans from the consumption of GM food" to urge the shire be declared GM-free

## 10. Egypt keen on food quality

<http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/>

**CAIRO - Any agricultural imports to Egypt must have a certificate from the country of origin that the product is not genetically modified and the rule will also apply to Egyptian exports, the official news agency said on Wednesday.**

The debate in Egypt over food quality has become politically heated after some Russian wheat was rejected over quality concerns. Members of parliament have been calling for stricter rules and greater agricultural self sufficiency.

Egyptian Agriculture Minister Amin Abaza was quoted as saying "it was necessary that all crops imported from abroad and exported from Egypt be accompanied by a certificate from the country of origin stating they are free of genetically modified materials."

"No agricultural products especially wheat, corn and soya bean would enter except after examining samples from the cargo," he said.

Egypt is one of the world's largest wheat importers and also imports other products such as corn, edible oils and sugar. It exports products such as vegetables and fruit particularly to Europe.

### 11. No to GM Corn!

[http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/france\\_no\\_gm\\_corn](http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/france_no_gm_corn)

**France will maintain a ban on genetically-modified corn from U.S. biotech giant Monsanto Co. (MON) until the environmental risks are clarified, French Prime Minister Francois Fillon said Thursday.**

"France is maintaining the suspension while it awaits a (European) Commission decision which it will respect," Fillon said at a joint press conference with commission chief, Jose Manuel Barroso in Brussels. His comments came shortly after France's food watchdog said it had concluded that the genetically modified corn is safe, contradicting an earlier report that led to the French ban.

"The decision to suspend the growing (of the corn) was taken as a precaution due to the potential environmental risks associated with a contamination of non-GMO crops," Fillon said.

The watchdog report concerns the health aspect, rather than the environmental risk, he said.

### 12. Non-GMO Soybean gets more acres!

[http://www.non-gmoreport.com/articles/july09/non-gmo\\_soybean\\_acreage\\_increased.php](http://www.non-gmoreport.com/articles/july09/non-gmo_soybean_acreage_increased.php)

US farmers planted one million more acres of non-GMO soybeans in 2009 than 2008, increasing to 6.97 million acres compared to 5.96 million acres the previous year.

Overall, non-GMO soybeans accounted for 9% of a record high 77.5 million acres of soybeans planted this year. In 2008, non-GMO soybeans accounted for 8% of 75.5 million acres of soybeans.

The percentage of farmers growing genetically modified soybeans decreased slightly from 92% in 2008 to 91% in 2009, the first drop in plantings of GM soybeans since 2000.

### Long march against GMO!

A 1,000 kilometre march from Berlin to Brussels to highlight the demand for a world-wide ban of GMO reached Brussels on 30th July. This sparked off a whole series of solidarity demonstrations in Poland.

Symbolic support-protests sprung up in 17 cities in different Provinces of Poland, where co-ordinators - who we had trained at our eco-centre in Styszow - and members of the Coalition for a GMO Free Poland were very active. Media followed and recorded marches to town halls where petitions were handed in demanding that Poland support a general ban of GMO across Europe, also putting pressure on the Polish government to ban the GM maize MON 810 and not to sell-out to the biotech industry and European Union.

Jadwiga Lopata and Julian Rose staged a protest in Krakow with other local activists. In temperatures of plus 32% centigrade a lively march set off to the town hall attracting considerable interest en route. Krakow is the seat of a number of biotechnology institutes that have a strong influence on government policy, but the board of the town council signed Krakow up to being a "GMO Free Zone" in 2005. Photos from Krakow [http://icppc.freshsite.pl/projekt/?page\\_id=419](http://icppc.freshsite.pl/projekt/?page_id=419)

## Stories from the film world

### 13. David versus Monsanto

<http://www.percyschmeiser.com/DVD.htm>

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Imagine that a storm blows across your garden - and that now, without your knowledge and without your consent, foreign and genetically-manipulated seeds are in your vegetable patch which you have nourished and maintained for many years. A few days later, representatives of a multi-national corporate group pay you a visit at home, demand that you surrender your vegetables and file a criminal complaint against you requesting a fine a \$20,000 USD against you - for the illegal use of patented and genetically-manipulated seeds.

This short story is no utopia - rather, around the world, the bitter truth. It is also the true experience of the family of Percy and Louise Schmeiser in Canada, also winners of the Alternative Nobel Prize, who meanwhile have been fighting the chemicals and seed manufacturer Monsanto since 1996. Nowadays, nearly three-fourths of genetically-manipulated plants harvested worldwide originate from Monsanto's labs. Monsanto is a U.S. based corporate group which calls the dismal inventions such as DDT, PCB and Agent Orange its own. In its efforts to gain absolute hegemony over plants - from the field all the way to the consumer's plate - Monsanto knows no qualms. The farmers Tony Rush, David Runyon and Marc Loisele also learned the hard way what it means to be confronted with Monsanto's methods of doing business, as did thousands of other farmers worldwide.

They and the Schmeisers are not just fighting against Monsanto - and with that, for the continuation of their livelihood as farmers - but also for the right to freedom of speech and the right to their property.

Yet above all, they are campaigning for the future of their children and grandchildren - so that they too, will have a chance to grow up in a world without genetically-manipulated food.

This film is reassuring...reassuring to all who fear that as an individual, no one would have any power to confront policy makers, large corporations or the business world. "David vs. Monsanto" proves the opposite.

### 14. Poisoning food and science

**RAJESHWARI S RAINA**

[http://www.downtoearth.org.in/UGasp?tdname=20090731&fname=news&sec\\_id=15&id=38](http://www.downtoearth.org.in/UGasp?tdname=20090731&fname=news&sec_id=15&id=38)

Governments have a way of ignoring inconvenient facts. Scientists from the National Botanical Research Institute in Lucknow, and Cambridge University, UK, have separately published scientific research results about arsenic in rice produced in parts of Bangladesh, India and Nepal. They have also spoken to decision-makers. The risks of poisoning from arsenic rice consumption are well quantified. If silence greets quantifiable risks, what should people expect from governments in cases where ambiguities, uncertainties and profit driven research methods prevail? This is the question posed by the film, *Poison on the platter*.

Directed by Ajay Kanchan and presented by Bollywood filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt, the film takes us through the ignorance and complacency of the Indian middle class, presents evidence of allergies, cancers, and other hazards of genetically modified (GM) foods.

The film begins with a quotation from the early 19th century US president Thomas Jefferson. This is somewhat against its thrust. For the film challenges American standards of food safety; it points to the Indian consumerist middle class happily feeding on GM contaminated Doritos corn chips, though the government of India has not permitted GM foods. In the current world

of financial meltdowns, food crises, energy constraints and other natural disasters, a Jeffersonian—anti-state and blindly pro-market—philosophy is not what we need.

In the 20th century, faith in science to deliver development goods marks almost all the decisions made by governments in sectors as varied as agriculture, health and communication. True, the world has witnessed Chernobyls and Challengers. But there is little doubt it is a different place because of science. There are countless benefits—including GM drugs that save millions of lives. It is science that tells us gene transfers between different species do take place in nature. But the film defies such understanding by positing genetic recombination across species as a problem. The problem with GM foods is not that it violates nature because of genetic recombination. When genetic recombination occurs naturally, toxicity or susceptibility to weather changes or other pests are reduced

or eliminated by natural selection. But GM foods industry (in the private and public sector) has no time or patience to allow for such evolutionary safeguards. When a plant is engineered to repel a pest, withstand a disease or survive a toxin sprayed to selectively kill weeds, products from the plant are tested against conventional plant products using the principle of substantial equivalence. But the principle leaves out something significant: genetic expression of the inserted gene also varies according to location specificity and agricultural production process. Besides this, testing for toxic chemicals in food is still an under-researched area.

Decisions based on flimsy evidence reduce faith in science. The film could have shown how GM food poisons science. But it does provoke a rethinking about decisions about our food.

***Rajeswari S Raina is at the Centre for Policy Research***

**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.**