



Monthly Bulletin
on Genetic Engineering
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National News

With the decision of the government soon to arrive, this issue of the bulletin is largely devoted to Bt brinjal as a final effort to save the humble vegetable from the predations of the corporate world. What follows is a picture of the nation's stand on this crucial issue.

1. Public Hearings to be conducted on BT Brinjal

<http://www.deccanchronicle.com/national/public-hearings-be-conducted-bt-brinjal-074>

New Delhi: Scientists, agriculture experts and consumer groups have welcomed the Union minister of environment, Jairam Ramesh's decision to hold public meetings from January to look into the safety aspects of the controversial Bt brinjal, which is the first genetically modified food crop to have been cleared for commercial release in India.

Dr Pushpa Bhargava, a genetic scientist, believes the ministry needs to create a platform where both critics and advocates be allowed to speak. The actual hearing must be preceded by advertisements giving details of the public meetings in both the national and regional papers he said.

KERALA

<http://m.livemint.com/s/6608/2?htmlUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.livemint.com%2F2010%2F01%2F04234947%2FQuick-Edit—The-black-hole-of.html&itemPos=5>

Kochi: There's a new player in the fight against Bt brinjal, a village panchayat in Kerala that is seeking to preserve a traditional variety of eggplant. As part of the plans of the village-level elected legislative body, around 8,000 households in the Mararikulam North gram panchayat in the coastal district of Alappuzha in Kerala will now grow the Marari variety, a slender green brinjal that has long been grown in this part of the world. The project is being bankrolled out of funds from the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The Mararikulam North campaign started in March at the screening of a film, *Poison on the Platter*, in

Kochi, where a team representing the panchayat showcased a variety of organically grown vegetables. "That was when people outside heard about our brinjal variety and so taking forward the message of the film that deals with the issue of genetically modified food crops, we went in for a campaign," said P. Priyeshkumar, president of the panchayat. "This is the first time that a panchayat, which has been in the forefront of agricultural revolution, has taken such an initiative to protect its biodiversity," said T.M. Thomas Isaac, state finance minister who represents Mararikulam constituency.

MADHYA PRADESH

http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/mp_against_gm_crops_says_its_westernisation_science

The BJP government in Madhya Pradesh has a new argument against genetically modified crops - "It is westernisation of agriculture science".

Farmers' Welfare and Agriculture Development Minister Dr Ramkrishna Kusmaria spelt out his government's stand while asking Union Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh not to allow commercial cultivation of Bt Brinjal. "Madhya Pradesh government strongly opposes westernisation of agriculture science and a narrow-minded approach," Dr Kusmaria wrote to Ramesh on Thursday. "The state government can't compromise on its policy of agriculture growth with organic farming."

KARNATAKA

<http://www.thehindu.com/2010/01/05/stories/2010010559960400.htm>
<http://www.hindu.com/2010/01/21/stories/2010012159810600.htm>

BANGALORE: Even as the State Government is yet to take a stand on the issue of Bt brinjal, the Karnataka State Organic Farming Mission, a statutory body, which met here on Monday, has sought a minimum five-year moratorium before the commercial cultivation of the genetically modified (GM) food crop is allowed. The decision will be conveyed to the Chief Minister's office within a couple of days. "As several stakeholders have expressed fears over Bt brinjal, we have suggested to the State

Government that more research be conducted before allowing its commercial cultivation," mission chairman A.S. Anand told The Hindu.

The commercialization of Bt brinjal will not be allowed in Karnataka and it will be conveyed to the Centre, Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa assured a delegation comprising many eminent personalities that met him here on Wednesday.

The delegation comprised Supreme Court-appointed observer to the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) Pushpa M. Bhargava, former Vice-Chancellor of University of Agricultural Sciences G.K. Veeresh and Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha leader Kodihalli Chandrashekar.

"The State Government will take a decision on the introduction of commercial cultivation of Bt. brinjal only after wider consultations with experts and the public. Several States had opposed Bt brinjal on human health and environmental grounds," the Chief Minister said.

BHUBANSESHWAR

There was an overwhelming rejection of Bt Brinjal in Bhubaneswar too. Union Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh said, at the end of the meeting that "West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa who together make up for more than 60% of India's brinjal production saying NO will have a bearing on my decision in this matter".

ANDHRA PRADESH

<http://www.hindu.com/2010/02/01/stories/2010020166391400.htm>
http://www.ndtv.com/news/india/andhra_opposes_bt_brinjal.php?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+ndtv%2FLsgd+%28NDTV+News+-+India%29

HYDERABAD: Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh faced angry protests at the consultations on *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) brinjal at the Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture here on Sunday.

The demonstration by activists of farmers' and non-governmental organisations, opposing

introduction of genetically modified crops began with the Minister's entry at the institute.

The protesters, led by Andhra Pradesh Rythu Sangham president K. Ramakrishna, blocked his entry to the auditorium.

Others, including activists of the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, raised slogans such as 'Bt brinjal go back' and 'Monsanto agents go back.' The exercise did not commence for one hour.

Andhra Pradesh was the cradle and became a flourishing field for genetically modified Bt cotton. Now the state governments own committee has recommended a moratorium against Bt brinjal, the first genetically modified food crop, proposed to be introduced in the country.

2. Bt brinjal divides science & health ministers

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/site/Story/80189/India/Bt+brinjal+divides+science+&+health+ministers.html>

New Delhi: Minister of state for health Dinesh Trivedi has opposed Bt brinjal. He, however, expressed his views as a Member of Parliament and not as a minister. "Bt brinjal needs lots of discussion and research," Trivedi said. He plans to take up the issue within his ministry. On the other hand, science and technology minister Prithviraj Chavan stood by the genetically modified crop and backed the approval given to it by an environment ministry committee. Chavan said, "We hope to see it release soon. We stand by the trials and safety studies done by the regulatory bodies. It is safe." The genetic engineering approval committee (GEAC) has cleared Bt brinjal as being safe for commercialization from environmental and health points of view. Department of biotechnology secretary M. K. Bhan said the Bt brinjal had been discussed by the scientific community thoroughly. It had been concluded that it was clean for environment and safe for humans. He said he had personally looked into all the data on the genetically modified vegetable crop.

3. Don't hasten introduction of Bt brinjal: M.S. Swaminathan

<http://www.hindu.com/2010/02/01/stories/2010020166231100.htm>

BHUBANESWAR: The government should not be in hurry to introduce Bt brinjal until fundamental issues were addressed, agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan said here on Saturday. Speaking to journalists on the sidelines of a consultation on “Effective community management of biodiversity in an era of climate change,” Dr. Swaminathan said: “Every technology has its benefits and risks. But it all depends on our capacity to analyse risks and benefits. We must analyse whether risks are more or benefits are more. There should be an authority to analyse the risks and benefits in a transparent way. Unfortunately, we don’t have an authority like that.”

Fast observed

Meanwhile, marking Mahatma Gandhi’s death anniversary, a group of activists comprising farmers, environmentalists, scientists and farmers’ leaders observed a fast here to protest the introduction of Bt brinjal.

They said Bt brinjal, which was an attempt by multinational seed giants to take control over the food, agriculture and sovereignty of the nation, should be opposed.

4. Bt Brinjal is a symbol of death

<http://d-sector.org/article-det.asp?id=879>

The scientists behind technological innovations like Bt Brinjal fail to understand the sensitive relationship between humans and nature. It is time they learn the right lessons from the women working on the farms.

This article is based on the statement made by P. V. Satheesh, Director of Deccan Development Society, in the Bt Brinjal Consultation organised in Bangalore by ICRA (Institute for Cultural Research and Action, Bangalore) and SAGE (South Against Genetic Engineering) on 20th January 2010.

As the Minister for Environment and Forests goes around the country eliciting opinions on India’s first Genetically Engineered food crop, I seek to make my statement. But my friends who are organizing a Consultation in Bangalore want me to make it a visionary Statement. I am petrified at the thought.

How does one make a “visionary statement”? Either one is too vain or too foolish to think that one is a visionary and can make a statement to match. In any case as far as I am concerned, more than 40 years ago, when I was in college, my vision got impaired. Doctors told me that I had seen solar eclipse with naked eyes and therefore my cornea had been burnt and my vision had become blurred. That was the first time that I had to get my vision corrected. Subsequently life had told me many times that there was an urgent need to correct my vision, be it in the case of my understanding of literature or media or art or just people around me.

As I kept on listening to people in some of the most unreachable villages, sitting on their charpoys, on their chaupals, inside their kitchens, in their farms and fields, slowly my vision of development got completely altered.

When I worked as a Television Producer for Doordarshan in ‘70s I used to travel extensively in the districts of Gulbarga, Raichur and Bijapur in Karnataka: districts which the development experts described as very backward. I began thinking them as truly backward and started my relationship with people there with a patronising attitude. *Here I am a practitioner of a state of the art media and you backward people, get ready to learn from me.* But it did not take many months for my vision to get corrected. As I kept on listening to people in some of the most unreachable villages, sitting on their *charpoys*, on their *chaupals*, inside their kitchens, in their farms and fields, slowly my vision of development got completely altered. I started finding how short-visioned we were in the Development Media. A huge correction resulted.

The most serious transformation in my vision came about two decades ago when I started working with about 5000 dalit women in Medak District of Andhra Pradesh. Again the famous “backward” area. The women came from the most excluded section of the society. They were all very small and marginal farmers. Most of them were illiterate. But what they taught me was a very profound understanding of what food and farming should look like. The

transformation they brought about in my vision of agriculture completely altered my thinking about these issues.

Therefore today if at all I have to make a visionary statement, it is their vision that I would like to present. Last month, I was in Copenhagen with a group of indigenous communities to present to the global community a Community Charter on Climate Change. At one of the events, there was a discussion on what demands to make from the governments of the world. One of the women from Madhya Pradesh who was a part of the delegation suddenly said: "Tell them that we have no demands to make. But if they want life back on this earth, let them demand it from us.,because only we know how to live with life and nature, and how to nurture it".

If we want agriculture to survive on this planet of ours, we must see it as a human relationship between us and the earth. Soil, seeds, plants, harvest and food - everything has life in it.

In essence she had summed up for me the lessons I had learnt over the past two decades. The lesson that I have learnt is this: "If we want agriculture to survive on this planet of ours, we must see it as a human relationship between us and the earth. Soil, seeds, plants, harvest and food - everything has life in it. Recognise and respect it." If this philosophy of the women is understood properly and practiced, issues like Bt Brinjal become irrelevant.

The women I work with laugh at the concept of very high yields. For them hybrid seeds are not the ones that bring prosperity. Actually those are seeds that give us "*aagam pantalu*", the crazy crops. This concept comes from a belief that the principles of nature must define how much crop we need to get from the earth. If you tried to get unbridled crop yield, you are not coaxing life out of the earth but are sucking the blood out of her. And that blood might help you prosper for a while. But eventually she will die and you are left with nothing. You will be an orphan. The great modern science tells us that we should never try to marry off a small girl. She should not bear a child before she

has passed out of her teens. And billions of dollars are spent in controlling the birth rate of our populations because the earth must not have too many people. Then how come the same science advocates the shortest duration for crops without allowing them to have a natural cycle of conception, birth and growth? Why is there no family planning for Mother Earth? Why must she yield uncontrollably?

If we are able to see through this vision of the dalit women of Medak, we can immediately see how the science of genetic engineering that pursues the goal of uncontrolled yields from earth escaping all principles of nature, is not a science of life and how Bt Brinjal becomes a symbol of death.

Therefore the question in front of us is whether to pursue life for earth or of death for nature. The choice I guess is fairly simple.

5."Bt brinjal is only an excuse for taking over Indian agriculture—reject GM seeds"

"SOUTH INDIAN COORDINATION COMMITTEE OF FARMERS' MOVEMENTS (SICCFM)
PRESS RELEASE

Coimbatore, January 19th 2010: Pointing out that multinational companies are using Indian agriculture universities as their acceptable front and that these institutions run by Indian taxpayers' funds should reject all such attempts by MNCs, leaders of various farmers' organizations of South India called for a complete rejection of Bt Brinjal and other GM seeds. They said that any seeds that enslave Indian farmers and poison our food and soils are not acceptable, whether they come from agriculture universities or from multinational corporations. Farmers' leaders from various organizations were taking part in a Conference on Bt Brinjal and Seed Sovereignty organized by the South Indian Coordination Committee of Indian Farmers' Movements. The Conference unanimously passed a resolution demanding that Tamil Nadu government also reject Bt Brinjal seeds just as the other three neighboring states of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh

and Karnataka have done. Mr K Sellamuthu, President of Uzhavar Uzhaipalar Katchi urged the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to take a stand against Bt Brinjal and such other seeds and expressed his hope that Chief Minister will continue to show long term vision in sustaining farmers' livelihoods in the state. He also called upon the government to ignore the faulty advice of some scientists in the.

Email: siccfm@gmail.com

6. 'Edibility of Bt brinjal Not Yet Confirmed'

<http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/edibility-of-bt-brinjal-not-yet-confirmed/568849/>

Ahmedabad: The edibility of the much debated Bt brinjal is yet to be confirmed even as the variety has passed the yield test and pest resistance analysis, said Dr M C Varshneya, Vice-Chancellor of Anand Agricultural University (AAU). He said nowhere in the word Bt brinjal was used as edible vegetable so far, not even in the US.

Dr Varshneya, who was here on Monday to announce the university's sixth annual convocation on Wednesday at Anand, said AAU had conducted only yield tests and pest resistance analysis on Bt brinjal samples. Therefore "we at AAU cannot opine on its edibility", he said. He reiterated that so far, no one has come up with the variety's edibility, not even in other countries.

GE World

7. Biotechnology 'no sure fix'!

<http://www.biosafety-info.net/article.php?aid=655>

Press Release

Union of Concerned Scientists, USA

http://www.ucsus.org/news/press_release/biotechnology-no-sure-fix-0321.html

Traditional Breeding and Ecological Practices Show More Promise in Curbing Nitrogen Overload

WASHINGTON - After more than a decade of effort, the biotechnology industry has yet to produce any commercial crops engineered to reduce nitrogen fertilizer pollution, while traditional breeding and other methods have improved the nitrogen use efficiency of wheat, rice, and corn by about 20 percent to 40 percent, according to a report released today by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS).

"Nitrogen pollution is among the world's worst environmental problems," said Doug Gurian-Sherman, a senior scientist in UCS's Food and Environment program and author of the report. "A number of very promising solutions have begun addressing the problem, but so far genetic engineering has yet to make a contribution."

Plants, including commodity farm crops, need large amounts of nitrogen to thrive and grow. Soils often do not contain enough nitrogen for

plants to attain optimal productivity, but many farmers apply far more synthetic nitrogen fertilizer to their soils than what the plants can use. More than half of the nitrogen fertilizer applied on U.S. farms, for instance, is not absorbed by crops, and much of it becomes a pollutant.

Nitrogen pollution causes harm in multiple ways. Chemical fertilizers from farms, for example, are the largest contributor to the Gulf of Mexico's "dead zone"-an area the size of Connecticut and Delaware combined where excess nutrients indirectly rob the region of oxygen, making it uninhabitable for commercially valuable fish and other marine life for much of the year. In addition, nitrogen in the form of nitrate can seep into drinking water and become a health risk, especially to pregnant women and children. Nitrogen entering the air as ammonia, meanwhile, contributes to smog, respiratory diseases and acid rain, which damages forests and other habitats.

Nitrogen overuse in agriculture also is the largest domestic, human-caused source of nitrous oxide, a global warming gas that is nearly 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, agricultural soil management accounts for two-thirds of the nation's human-induced nitrous oxide emissions.

8. GM cotton crops in US useless

<http://www.abc.net.au/rural/sa/content/2010/01/s2790653.htm>

Genetically modified cotton crops in the United States are becoming useless, as weeds evolve a resistance to the herbicide glyphosate.

In the southern cotton crops, mutant weeds are becoming so bad mechanical harvesters are being damaged, and weed control must be done by hand.

A scientific study has found that the herbicide resistant weed population could threaten GM crop technology.

The study was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences journal. In this report: Dr Todd Gains, study's lead author, University of Western Australia.

9. Study Proves Three Monsanto Corn Varieties' Noxiousness to the Organism

For the original article in French in Le Monde http://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2009/12/11/une-etude-prouve-la-nocivite-pour-l-organisme-de-trois-mais-monsanto_1279552_3244.html#ens_id=1269926

For the paper in English in the International Journal of Biological Sciences:

<http://www.biolsci.org/v05p0706.htm>

Le Monde with AFP, 11 December 2009 <http://www.truthout.org/1215091>

A new European study "clearly reveals ... new side effects linked with GM maize consumption" affected the liver and kidneys, but also other organs for three Monsanto GMO corn varieties. (Photo: DawnOne)

A study published in the International Journal of Biological Sciences demonstrates the toxicity of three genetically modified corn varieties from the American seed company

Monsanto, the Committee for Independent Research and Information on Genetic Engineering (Criigen, based in Caen), which participated in that study, announced Friday, December 11.

"For the first time in the world, we've proven that GMO are neither sufficiently healthy nor proper to be commercialized. [...] Each time, for all three GMOs, the kidneys and liver, which are the main organs that react to a chemical food poisoning, had problems," indicated Gilles-Eric Seralini, an expert member of the Commission for Biotechnology Reevaluation, created by the EU in 2008.

Translation: Truthout French Language Editor Leslie Thatcher.

10. Seed behemoth Monsanto stumbles into antitrust trouble

<http://www.grist.org/article/2009-12-15-seed-behemoth-monsanto-stumbles-into-antitrust-trouble/>

Even as it bombards the airwaves and magazine ad pages to tout its commitment to "sustainable agriculture," GMO seed giant Monsanto has been having a rough go on the PR front of late.

First came a report (http://www.organic-center.org/reportfiles/13Years20091126_FullReport.pdf PDF) from the Organic Center showing that the company's core Round Up Ready products have sparked a veritable monsoon of herbicide use. According to the report, since the introduction of "herbicide tolerant" corn, soy, and cotton in 1996, farmers have sprayed 382.6 million more pounds of herbicides than they otherwise would have."

http://www.ucsus.org/assets/documents/food_and_agriculture/no-sure-fix.pdf (PDF)

<http://www.biolsci.org/v05p0706.htm>

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.