



Monthly Bulletin
on **Genetic Engineering**
November 2009

For details:

South Against Genetic Engineering (SAGE)

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

email: ddshyderabad@gmail.com

net edition: www.ddsindia.com

Contents

National News

1. Expert Panel under pressure to clear Bt Brinjal!
Down to Earth interview with Dr Bhargava:
2. Where is the science?
3. Bt brinjal can awaken a sleeping poison!
4. Food for Thought
5. Protest Meet against Bt Products!
6. Action demanded against Bt Seed Manufacturers
7. DDS Alerts Government!
8. Concern over Bt Brinjal
9. Stop GM Corn trials at PAU, says mission
10. Farming needs change of vision!

GE Issues around World

11. Patents Posing Threats!
12. Killing Foes and Friends as well!
13. NO to GE in Pak!
14. France prepares voluntary 'GMO-Free' labels
15. Monsanto wants to save Our Oceans! A Long History of Untruth!
16. Monsanto asks for review!

National News

1. Expert Panel under pressure to clear Bt Brinjal!

CNN-IBN Exclusive
 PRESS RELEASE: November 30 2009
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/BT-brinjal-clearance-ignored-dissenters/articleshow/5216523.cms>

NEW DELHI: In what is bound to raise the bar for the government to clear GM brinjal, the Supreme Court appointed observer on the GEAC has written to the environment ministry that his and two other members' dissenting voice was ignored while giving a hasty recommendation for the environmental release of the BT brinjal.

The final report of the GEAC did not contain any dissenting report. It instead read like a unanimous view of all the members of the committee.

Bhargava has said that he was in no doubt that the clearance of BT brinjal was pre-planned and the committee was an eye-wash.

Dr. Bhargava says that Professor Aruja Reddy made a confidential call to him and said that 8 of the tests that should have been done were not done. Professor Reddy told him that he was under "tremendous pressure" to clear Bt Brinjal and had calls from the Agriculture Minister, GEAC and Industry. He also said that he was in a dilemma.

CNN-IBN also spoke to Professor Arjula Reddy, the chairman of EC 2. When asked if he was under pressure since he headed a powerful committee, Professor Reddy did not deny that he was under pressure, he told CNN-IBN, "you think this is powerful... the decisions were already taken by the Review Committee on Genetic Engineering (the RCGM)" When asked if he was under

pressure since he headed a powerful committee, Professor Reddy did not deny that he was under pressure, he told CNN-IBN, "you think this is powerful... the decisions were already taken by the Review Committee on Genetic Engineering (the RCGM)"

When asked if he was under pressure since he headed a powerful committee, Professor Reddy did not deny that he was under pressure, he told CNN-IBN, "you think this is powerful... the decisions were already taken by the Review Committee on Genetic Engineering (the RCGM)" When repeatedly questioned, Professor Reddy said, "Dr. Bhargava was his friend and his commitment to science or public health cannot be questioned... I am a government servant, I cannot talk". When asked whether Professor Reddy was happy with the report, he said, "chairman of the committee will never be happy in any committee...it is part of life, that's all I can say at this stage... I tried my best to raise questions and look at data as critically as possible". Environment minister Jairam Ramesh declined to comment on the letter.

2. Down to Earth interview with Dr Bhargava:

You can hear the audio recording of Dr Bhargava's interview here:
http://csestore.cse.org.in/bt_brinjals.asp

Q. What do you think of the Expert Committee's report submitted to the GEAC?

Dr Bhargava: It was a disaster. There were internal inconsistencies between what was in the report and what primary data was put on the website and there were absurdities in the report.

They didn't even give time – the Committee only had two meetings of about 3 hours each.

You see this report, which is of several hundred pages... You don't write a report just like that. My feeling is that the report had already been written by Monsanto.

The Meeting was on the 14th, Wednesday. It was sent to the members on Friday the 9th, late. Many of the members of the Executive Committee are part of the GEAC so to them it didn't matter when the report came as they were party to the report. Many other members of the GEAC would gladly support any GM crop. Only 3 or 4 [regulators], and I was one of them, had to go through that report. To find time on Monday was simply not possible.

At night, at 2 o'clock, I glanced at the report and I found the report was full of mistakes everywhere and some absurd statements. So I said why don't you postpone this decision by one month and invite all those from whom this reports comments have come; invite the members of the GEAC, Monsanto's man and ECII members and let's have a scientific discussion. But this was simply not accepted.

Q. So what is your comment on the fact that they have said, at the end of the report that Dr Bhargava's call to raise the bar on research and development will actually be detrimental to research in public sector institutions?

Bhargava: Of course I'm saying raise the bar! You are playing with the lives of people and you are (questioning) raise the bar?

Q. Do you think there is a lot of pressure on the GEAC and the Ministry from the biotech companies?

Bhargava: Of course there is. Point is should they succumb to the pressure? — ——. Since I've been on the GEAC, there are at least 100 papers which I have referenced by distinguished scientists who

have nothing to do with the business, and they talk about adverse properties of GM crops. Now at least, these should be discussed in the GEAC? NOT ONE PAPER HAS EVER BEEN DISCUSSED

So it is very interesting. What you can conclude, and you can quote me on this: Whatever Monsanto says is God's own word. No matter who it is who says that you must do more tests, the man is a fool!

Q. Do you think genetic modification is a good option for food security?

Bhargava: Let's remember, we have sold ourselves out to the United States of America because multi-national corporations all started from there. So we say what America says.

Q. In case the Minister allows Bt brinjal in that case what precautionary step should be taken. What is the next option that people can look for?

Bhargava: The next option is that people should stop eating brinjal, very simple. I can convey to the vendors I know, don't buy brinjal.

Q. Would labeling help, by any chance?

Bhargava: You see, labeling should in any case be there. Because we don't have labelling, [who] knows how much of GM food we have around in the market.. because we have no labeling laws. Not only that. We have no institute in the country, which can TEST. Remember all the tests which have been done - of 30 tests that have been recommended only 7-8 have been done, they've been done by Monsanto, or on samples provided by Monsanto. We don't even know if Monsanto did the tests!

Q. But is there a problem [if], suppose, Bt brinjal is being grown in a field, then

the crops around it would also get polluted?

Bhargava: Of course!

Q. The fact that this case was in the SC and the GEAC has said, OK we are giving environmental clearance, does the SC have no say in this whole [business]?

Bhargava: Actually they are going against the SC. The fact that there is a SC case, they actually had no business to give that clearance

Q. Clearance would be null and void now?

Bhargava: Well I don't know how the SC sees.

Q. It's actually [an] illegal way of clearing this?

Bhargava: Certainly unethical, if that means anything at all.

3. Where is the science?

Sujatha Byravan

<http://www.indiatogether.org/2009/nov/agr-gmsci.htm>

There is a blatant attempt by GM promoters to polarise the discussion and manufacture a science-vs.-anti science debate. All those who oppose GM crops are neither anti-science nor luddites. Indeed, many scientists have been, and still are, critical of GM for a number of good reasons. Scientists and scientific academies, including the National Research Council of the US National Academy of Sciences, have expressed serious concerns regarding the scientific rigour of experiments and the impacts of GM crops, especially on biodiversity.

Those who support GM crops generally believe that science and technology can solve most problems, and see crops as requiring tinkering to improve agriculture. It is such short-term and piecemeal thinking that led to the excesses of the Green Revolution causing damage to soils, depletion of ground water and other harms to ecosystems. There are other supporters of GM who continue to believe that private production of goods and services is inherently superior to public ones, even as governments have been bailing out the private sector in the last year! And then there are those who have financial gains to make if the GM industry prospers.

Let me compare the GM debate with the other major scientific debate - global warming. While scientists who work on climate change and global warming rightly embrace the precautionary principle, many who work in the area of GM plant technologies abandon it altogether. A charitable explanation is that this may have to do with differing perceptions of risk in each case. Perhaps global warming is seen as a serious threat to the entire world, and GM crops may not be understood in the same way. Moreover, some benefits have been attributed to these crops by promoters, making it harder for people to reject them.

The science behind genetic engineering of plants is itself outdated as it continues to view a gene as a single self-contained unit of DNA sequence that transfers information linearly to RNA (ribonucleic acid) and then to proteins. What this implies is that simply introducing a DNA sequence into a plant and expecting a complex trait to be successfully transferred is not justified.

4. Bt brinjal can awaken a sleeping poison!

<http://www.deccanchronicle.com/dc-comment/bt-brinjal-can-awaken-sleeping-poison-245>

What, you may ask, is common between potatoes, tomatoes, brinjal, chilli, datura, tobacco and the deadly nightshade (belladonna)? They all belong to a plant family called Solanaceae. The Solanaceae family contains a number of important agricultural plants as well as many psychoactive and toxic plants. Solanaceae species are rich in complex chemicals called alkaloids and contain some of the most poisonous plants known to mankind. They produce alkaloids in their roots, leaves and flowers. These alkaloids can be hallucinogens, stimulants or outright toxic. For example, when potatoes are exposed to light, a chemical called solanin is produced which appears as a green tinge. Green potatoes can be toxic, damage an unborn fetus and cause abortions. Other plants of this family known for their toxic qualities are belladonna, datura and tobacco. Now brinjal, a member of this family, has been genetically engineered (GE) to produce a toxin to protect itself against a particular pest. This seems to be a process working to reverse several thousand years of efforts to detoxify natural plants to make them fit for human consumption!

Genetic engineering in plants of the Solanaceae family could be dangerous since disturbing their genetic material through the process of inserting new gene constructs containing a battery of genes — including the toxin producing Bt gene — may trigger off metabolic processes that have been lying dormant. There are apprehensions that not only could new toxins develop but that old toxins that were removed by selective breeding may reappear. Disturbing the cell metabolism (by genetic engineering) of species that are naturally genetically hardwired to produce toxins, is likely to call up old plant toxins in these species.

4. Food for Thought

<http://www.business-standard.com/india/news/experts-urge-for-gm-free-karnataka/376104/>

MYSORE: A conference on “Genetic engineering, farming and food” held here discussed the science behind genetically modified (GM) crops and examined their ramifications on food security, environment and genetic diversity.

The conference, organised by the Institution of Engineers in conjunction with Mysore Grahakara Parishat and the Deccan Development Society, Hyderabad, was held in the backdrop of the Government’s move to introduce genetically modified brinjal in Indian market.

Delivering the keynote address, Michel Pimbert, Director, International Institute for Environment and Development, the United Kingdom, said bad science influenced by corporate power enabled genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to enter market.

Lead petitioner in PIL against GM foods in Supreme Court Aruna Rodrigues demanded that the release of Bt-brinjal be stopped. Describing the promises of biotechnology in agriculture as hollow, DDS director P V Satheesh remarked, “We feel the thick blanket of half truths wrap the secrets of the success stories of GE.” MGP president S G Vombatkere said everyone should start thinking of GE and its impact.

“We do not want GM (genetically modified) crops which can prove apocalyptic for mankind. Let us say never to Bt-brinjal”. The declaration, along with the demand that state government declare Karnataka GM-free,” was made at the conference.

5. Protest Meet against Bt Products!

South Against Genetic Engineering (SAGE), Institute For Cultural Research And Action (ICRA) and Organic Farmers Prayog Parivars of Bellary, Mysore and Chamarajanagar Districts jointly organized a protest meeting at Kottureshwara Mahavidyalaya Auditorium, Kottur, Kudlagi Taluk, Bellary District, Karnataka on 26.10.09. Nearly 800 farmers, most of them women, participated in the meeting. The meeting passed a resolution opposing the move to give clearance for the commercial release of BT brinjal, and sent it to the Prime Minister, Chief Minister of Karnataka, and the Vice-Chancellor of Dharwad Agriculture. University. The resolution warned against the serious threat posed by BT Cotton which has completely replaced all other cotton seeds in this region. The resolution highlighted the rich tradition of brinjal(organic) cultivation in this region and how all these wonderful local brinjal varieties are going to face serious threat by the introduction of BT brinjal.

6. Action demanded against Bt Seed Manufacturers

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/Action-demanded-against-Bt-seed-manufacturers/articleshow/5216572.cms>

NAGPUR: With the state cotton federation now officially acknowledging a big loss to cotton crop, farmers' pressure group Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti has demanded that the government should seek compensation to the tune of Rs 4,000 crore from Bt cotton seed manufacturers and insecticide, pesticide makers for the losses suffered by farmers.

In the state government-sponsored campaign, over 24 lakh farmers took to genetically modified seeds in 34 lakh

hectares. The campaign was led by its own seed company Mahyco which is among those that have obtained license from a multinational company for its Bt cotton seeds. The gullible farmers fell prey to the advertisement blitz by the seed companies which claimed that Bt seeds would give bumper crops even in rain fed areas like Vidarbha where irrigation facilities are abysmally low," alleged VJAS president Kishore Tiwari.

7. DDS Alerts Government!

The Deccan Development Society, which has been studying the fate of cotton for the past nine years in collaboration with a number of other organizations, has drawn the attention of the Government of Andhra Pradesh to the damage caused to the cotton crop this year in the districts of Warangal, Adilabad and Karimnagar. In a letter addressed to the Commissioner for Agriculture and the Secretary, Food & Agriculture, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Mr.M.A.Qayum, Consultant (DDS) while listing the pathological problems of the crop, has pointed out that some susceptibility element present in the Bt hybrid or some weakness in the plant may have had a role in the episode.

8. Concern over Bt Brinjal

http://www.ptinews.com/news/385177_WB-govt-concerned-over-Bt-brinjal

Kolkata, Nov 19 (PTI): The West Bengal government today expressed concern at the Centre's proposal to allow commercial cultivation of genetically-modified Bt-brinjal. "There are clear reasons to be concerned about 'gene spills' or the contamination of landraces by the engineered variety. This means that it has the potential to threaten bio- diversity, destabilise important ecosystems and limit the future agricultural possibilities in a region," Chief Minister

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said in a letter to Union Minister for Environment and Forest Jairam Ramesh

9. Stop GM Corn trials at PAU, says mission

Tribune News Service
<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20091008/punjab.htm#5>

Chandigarh, October 7

The Kheti Virasat Mission, an NGO engaged in environment protection, has urged Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal to order the immediate termination of genetically modified (GM) corn trials at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana.

10. Farming needs change of vision!

Narrating his experiences as an organic farmer, Mr. Subhash Sharma, a committed activist advocating the cause of natural farming has reiterated that the country's agricultural scene needs a radical change of perspective: "Once farmers understand the techniques of natural farming, their agro-economics will become strong. Villages will have abundant water, the groundwater level will increase and the nation will become rich in water resources.

I must say that agriculture demands major changes today. The new agro-economics based on natural agriculture can only benefit the farmers, society and the nation. SOIL, water and seeds are the strength of farmers. "

Expressing his dissatisfaction with the way in which we have fallen out of harmony with nature, Mr Sharma insists that agriculture should uphold respect for both man and nature: "Increased mechanisation, which made human labour redundant, led to large-scale migration of rural people towards urban areas. The kind of urban living turned out to be worse than hell and gave rise to enhanced urban crime. This is what happened to our human resource.

We have already lost our seeds and are being forced to depend now on genetically modified (GM) seeds which are harmful to human health as well as the environment. Such seeds are to be considered as 'terminator' seeds as they hardly germinate during the following season. Wherever farmers have adopted GM seeds the soils have deteriorated and many new diseases have started affecting the crops.

Also, the rising atmospheric temperature has had its own damaging effect on production patterns. In the year 2008-09 my farm production declined by 25% but my profit doubled because of market forces (less availability led to increased prices). But this is not a good sign."

GE Issues around the World

11. Patents Posing Threats!

twnet@po.jaring.my

Geneva, 23 Oct (Riaz K. Tayob) — A global civil society coalition sent a public warning to the UN General Assembly that a new class of patents covering plants and

animals endangers both innovation and food security, echoing the sentiments of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

The "Global alert against Monstantosizing' our food" was released on 21 October by the "No Patents on Seeds" coalition, coinciding with the presentation of similar

concerns by the UN Special Rapporteur, Olivier de Schutter, on the Right to Food, at the Third Committee (dealing with Social, Humanitarian and Cultural issues) in New York.

The alert was initiated by the organisations Berne Declaration, Swissaid, Misereor No Patents on Life (Switzerland), Greenpeace and The Development Fund (Norway), supported by farmer organisations from Europe, South America and Asia. They include Coldiretti in Italy, COAG in Spain, dairy farmers from Germany, Federacion Agraria Argentina and Bharat Krishak Samaj, an Indian farmer organisation.

Directed at governments, parliaments and patent offices, the alert warns about a new class of patents covering plants and animals derived from conventional breeding. "These patents even claim harvests and derived food products such as milk, butter and bread," the report revealed.

By speaking of "Monsantosizing", the signatories to the alert warned that the whole chain from seed to food production might be controlled by a few big international corporations like Monsanto, DuPont and Syngenta, leading to a process of oligopolies and increasing concentration.

"A radical change in both patent legislation and the practice of patent offices is needed to eliminate patents on plants and farm animals," said Francois Meienberg of the Berne Declaration. "Corporations should not be allowed to continue to misappropriate and monopolise seeds, plants and farm animals via patent law. If they are, these patents will become a major threat to global food security, food sovereignty and innovation."

"The big companies are about to control seed, harvest, trade and even food

production," warned Luis Contigiani at Federacion Agraria Argentina.

"We can see how Monsanto tries to license fees on soy production, imposing embargoes on European importers of Argentinean soy and derivatives based on patents that are not valid in our country. This is an example of the consequences when genetic resources are subjected to the logic of monopolisation by patent rights."

12. Killing Foes and Friends as well!

<http://bit.ly/VzhYw>

Plants that are genetically modified to kill the herbivorous insects may also affect these insects' natural enemies.

It's all out war out there in the farmer's field. Crops can either be lucky or grow in peace until harvest, or they may be unlucky and succumb to an attack by harmful insects. These insects have their own enemies such as predators or parasites. It is a rugged but natural order.

13. NO to GE in Pak!

http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=204745

On October 15, 2009, the Lok Sanjh Foundation and the Pakistan Dehqan Assembly organized a conference on rice and the food crisis, focusing on small farmer livelihoods. More than 600 farmers, tenants, landless workers and partner organizations from different parts of the Sheikhpura region participated in the event, which was part of the Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP) People's Year of Rice Action (YORA).

Farmers at the conference stressed that genetically engineered (GE) crops and

seeds should be banned in Pakistan. A key recommendation was to protect Basmati growing areas from all non-Basmati varieties, including GE and hybrid rice. Participants rejected the Seed Act and the Plant Breeder's Right Act and demanded their rights to save and exchange seeds. They demand an immediate ban on Genetically Engineered crops and call on the Government of Punjab to withdraw the Agreement of Intent with Monsanto to introduce Bt cotton. They impressed upon the government that food and agriculture policies must be premised on achieving self-sufficiency in food production through local food producers. Domestic food production must be prioritized to enhance livelihoods and counter the trend towards corporate and export-oriented agriculture.

In this context, it is pertinent to mention here that a senior US scientist, Dr Michael Hansen, has said that genetically modified crops are not the panacea for food security. Rather, the answer to food security lies with small-scale, ecologically rational, sustainable agriculture that focuses on local food systems. Asked to what extent the apprehension was true that with the introduction of Bt cotton and other genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) seed business in Pakistan is likely to be monopolised, he said: "The answer is yes."

14. France prepares voluntary 'GMO-Free' labels

Agra Europe, 4 November 2009

<http://www.agra-net.com> via <http://www.gmfreeireland.org>

France is set to create a set of voluntary 'GMO-free' labelling schemes to help conventional agricultural producers to distinguish their produce in the market, it emerged this week.

15. Monsanto wants to Save Our Oceans! A Long History of Untruth!

http://www.monsanto.com/monsanto_today/2009/pledge_omega3_soybeans.asp
http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article6907852.ece
[http://www.genewatch.org/article.shtml?als\[cid\]=564515&als\[itemid\]=565536](http://www.genewatch.org/article.shtml?als[cid]=564515&als[itemid]=565536)

Oh yes, it's true. Monsanto is here to rescue us from overfishing. How, you ask? By engineering a variety of soybean with extra omega-3. And last week, the FDA decided that the oil of the new omega-3 soybean is GRAS - Generally Recognized as Safe.

The confirmation of GRAS status enables food companies to develop and test foods containing the new omega-3 oil, which are important steps towards consumers being able to benefit from this omega-3 product in a variety of food products with an acceptable taste experience.

As you can see on Monsanto Today, Monsanto is very pleased to give the world such a great product - one which will provide a source of omega-3s in our diet without a fishy flavor, and one which will mean we don't need to overfish the oceans in order to get enough omega-3s. I'm sorry, but that's like inflating the tires on a Hummer and saying you're doing something to help fight global warming.

The greatest fallacy would be to suggest that Monsanto's new product might somehow tackle the problem of the 84,000 Americans who died of heart disease and might not have done if they had eaten a sufficient amount of fatty acid in their diets, according to a 2005 study. Those people who died of heart disease had poor diets. Eating a healthy balanced diet gives you enough omega 3s without any need for additives in processed

food. For the same reasons, hunger, poverty and nutritional problems in the developing world can't be fixed by growing commodity crops. What people need are better diets.

Responding to the announcement, Dr Helen Wallace, Director of GeneWatch UK, said: There is a long history of 'magic ingredients' turning out to be harmful to some people and even having the opposite effect on health from that originally claimed".

16. Monsanto asks for review!

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

Monsanto Co. asked the U.S. Supreme Court to review a lower court's decision to ban the planting of genetically modified alfalfa until an environmental review is complete.

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.