

# China Is Helping Big Agribusiness Domination of World Food System by Promoting GM Crops and Related Companies

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*While the global south expects China to play a leading role in preventing and resisting the increasing domination of the world food system by giant western agribusiness companies, **in recent times China appears to be colluding in this domination by promoting GM crops and related businesses in a big way.***

On January 18 2024 Reuters reported (report titled 'China's embrace of GMO crops gains momentum with new import, planting approvals'),

"The agriculture ministry approved the domestic production of six more varieties of genetically modified corn, two of soybeans and one of cotton."

**What is more the planting of GM crops was expanded to a much wider area and Chinese firms were allowed to develop and sell GM seeds. GM imports were also facilitated. Later in the year Reuters also reported regarding at least partial acceptance of GM wheat here in a report titled 'China approves first gene-edited wheat in step to open up GM tech to food crops'.**

The South China Morning Star reported in an article '6 things to know about China's GM Food Development' that China has permitted GM corn, soybean, papaya and cotton and last year trial crops were planted on 267,000 hectares. 37 GM corn varieties and 14 GM soybean varieties have been permitted. Syngenta here is now owned by Chinese state owned giant company ChemChina following a \$43 billion deal. GM labeling laws are likely to be relaxed.

Recent reports have stated that Chinese scientists have used gene editing to increase the sugar content of tomatoes by up to 30 per cent.

Apart from spread of GM crops, a proliferation of businesses involved in promotion of GM crops is being reported and some of the biggest of these companies are issuing estimates of very high and rapid spread of GM crops in China. Tomorrow these companies may emerge as big promoters of GM crops in several countries of the global south adding to a similar role being already played by some giant western agribusiness companies.

As more and more clearances are being given for imports of GM crops and foods, this will further help wider spread of GM crops as China is a very big importer of soybeans in particular.

In fact these disturbing trends may have gone further ahead but for the fact there is

considerable consumer and public resistance to GM crops and foods, although attempts have been made to reduce this. One study found that in 2018 only 12% of consumers in China had a positive view of GM crops. Another study found that 55% of consumers opposed GM foods while 60% had an unfavorable view of GM crop scientists. A region which is a big grower of soybeans banned GMOs some time back (see report titled 'China's Genetically Modified Dilemma' published by Asia Society, 23 May, 2024).

However it remains to be seen whether China's authoritarian systems will allow enough space to voices of protest against the increasing inroads of GM crops and foods.

If GM crops dominate Chinese agriculture in the near future, this decision will come back to haunt China in more ways than one, as instead of fulfilling the publicized promise of increased productivity, within a few years these GM crops will increase many problems of farmers, apart from increasing health risks greatly and contaminating the environment. As India's eminent scientist Prof. Pushpa M. Bhargawa summarized the available scientific literature on GM crops some time back,

"There are over 500 research publications by scientists of indisputable integrity who have no conflict of interest, that establish harmful effects of GM crops on human, animal and plant health and on environment and biodiversity...On the other hand, virtually every paper supporting GM crops is by scientists who have a declared conflict of interest or whose credibility and integrity can be doubted."

Further as the eminent scientists comprising the Independent Science Panel have stated,

"GM crops have failed to deliver the promised benefits and are posing escalating problems on the farm. Transgenic contamination is now widely acknowledged to be unavoidable, and hence there can be no co-existence of GM and non-GM agriculture. Most important of all, GM crops have not been proven safe. On the contrary, sufficient evidence has emerged to raise serious safety concerns, that if ignored could result in irreversible damage to health and the environment. GM crops should be firmly rejected now."

One can only hope that the Chinese authorities will soon realize their serious blunder and take back their promotion of GM crops before further grave harm is caused. Meanwhile, countries like India should realize that their responsibility to keep away GM crops and particularly GM food crops and GM food has further increased and if they show the wisdom for this, the future of GM-free safe and healthy food will belong to those who show wisdom today to keep away the high-risk GM technology.

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