

GM Food Crops Illegally Growing in India: The Criminal Plan to Change the Genetic Core of the Nation's Food System

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The [GM Contamination Register](#) database is run by Genewatch and Greenpeace and contains cases of genetically modified (GM) contamination dating from 1997. The authors of a [2014 paper](#), published in the *International Journal of Food Contamination*, analysed 400 or so cases in the database by crop and country.

GM rice accounted for about a third of contamination cases, despite the fact there is officially no GM rice grown anywhere in the world. They also focused on cases of contamination arising from unauthorised GM crops: those without any authorisation for commercial growing anywhere in the world. Nine cases were discovered of GM contamination of these unauthorised (non-commercialised) GM crops that haven't undergone any environmental or food safety analysis. The authors argue that once GM contamination has happened, it can be difficult to contain.

Don Westfall, biotech industry consultant and vice-president of Promar International back in 2001, was at the time quoted by the *Toronto Star* (9 January 2001) as saying that the hope of the GM industry is that over time the market is so flooded with genetically modified organisms (GMOs) that there's nothing you can do about it; you just sort of surrender.

It is not just a vague hope. It is an intentional strategy.



Roundup's active ingredient, glyphosate, is the most heavily-used agricultural chemical in history. (Photo: Mike Mozart/Flickr/cc)

GM wheat is not approved to be grown for commercial use in the US or anywhere else in the world. Yet in 2013, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that unapproved GM wheat had been found growing in an Oregon wheat field. Since 1994, [Monsanto has](#)

[conducted](#) 279 field trials of Roundup Ready wheat over more than 4,000 acres of land in 16 US states. The USDA has admitted that Monsanto's GMO experiments from 1998 to 2005 were held in open wheat fields. The GM wheat escaped and found its way into commercial wheat fields in Oregon (and possibly 15 other states), causing self-replicating genetic pollution that now taints the entire US wheat industry.

Prior to this, in 2006, the USDA granted marketing approval of GM Liberty Link 601 (Bayer CropScience) rice variety following its [illegal contamination](#) of the food supply and rice exports. The USDA effectively sanctioned an 'approval-by-contamination' policy.

The GMO agritech industry's strategy has been to first spread seeds illegally or contaminate supplies and then obtain regulatory approval. It has not only happened in the US, but in India too.

Unremitting fraud in India to contamination by all means necessary

In India, [four high-level reports](#) have advised against the adoption of GM crops:

- The 'Jairam Ramesh Report' of February 2010, imposing an indefinite moratorium on Bt Brinjal;
- The 'Sopory Committee Report' [August 2012];
- The 'Parliamentary Standing Committee' [PSC] Report on GM crops [August 2012]; and
- The 'Technical Expert Committee [TEC] Final Report' [June-July 2013]).

These reports advocate this approach because the story of GM crops in India has thus far [been a case of](#) blatant violations of biosafety norms, hasty approvals, a lack of monitoring abilities, general apathy towards the hazards of contamination and a lack of institutional oversight mechanisms.

Despite these reports, the push to get GM mustard commercialised (which would be India's first officially-approved GM food crop) has been relentless. The case is still held up in the Supreme Court even though the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) deemed it necessary to give it the nod.

This mustard is being undemocratically forced through with [flawed tests or no tests and a lack of public scrutiny](#): in other words, [unremitting scientific fraud and outright regulatory delinquency](#). This crop is also herbicide-tolerant (HT) (to be reliant on Bayer's non-selective weedkiller Basta - glufosinate, a neurotoxin), which is [wholly inappropriate](#) for a country like India with its small biodiverse farms that could be affected by its application.

Despite the ban on GM crops, in 2005, prominent biologist **Pushpa Bhargava** alleged that there were reports that unapproved varieties of several GM crops were being sold to farmers in India. In 2008, [Arun Shrivastava wrote](#) that illegal GM okra had been planted in India and poor farmers had been offered lucrative deals to plant 'special seed' of all sorts of vegetables.

In 2013, a group of scientists and NGOs protested in Kolkata and elsewhere against the introduction of transgenic brinjal in Bangladesh - a centre for origin and diversity of the vegetable - as it would give rise to contamination of the crop in India. As predicted, in 2014, the [West Bengal government said](#) it had received information regarding "infiltration" of

commercial seeds of GM Bt brinjal from Bangladesh, which that country had gone ahead with commercial releasing.

At the time, **Pradeep Majumdar**, agriculture advisor to State Chief Minister **Mamata Banerjee**, stated:

“Commercial seeds may have infiltrated... they might have been smuggled in. We have to ascertain the various effects of Bt brinjal on local indigenous species before taking any step else farmers will suffer.”

Bt brinjal had never undergone independent safety testing but the industry’s own tests [show it is toxic](#).

In 2017, the illegal cultivation of a GM food crop – GM soyabean – which is HT, has been reported from Aravalli district in Gujarat. Bhartiya Kisan Sangh (BKS), a national farmers organisation, has claimed that Gujarat farmers have been cultivating HT crop illegally as there is no clearance from the government for any GM food crop. There are also reports of [HT cotton illegally growing in India](#) too, prompting calls for probes into the workings of the GEAC and other official bodies.

The Times of India [reports](#) BKS general secretary **Badrinarayan Chaudhary** as saying:

“The HT soyabean was cultivated this year in three villages in the Modasa taluka in Aravalli district in Gujarat. The farmers produced three tonnes of the soyabean. Someone had given the farmers a buy back guarantee at four times the price of the soyabean in the market. This became the talk of the town and BKS came to know about it. We informed the state agriculture department which enquired into the issue and seized the seed material on Diwali day. The test results by government lab were found to be positive for the Roundup (glyphosate-the herbicide) of Monsanto.”

Chaudhary said that BKS had also alerted the GEAC, but the committee has taken no notice.

In the same report, Coalition for GM Free India (CGMFI) spokesperson **Kavitha Kuruganti** said that the regulators have been caught sleeping. She says that India’s first GM crop cultivation – Bt cotton – was discovered in 2001 growing on thousands of hectares in Gujarat, spread surreptitiously and illegally by the biotech industry. The GEAC was caught off-guard when news about large scale illegal cultivation of Bt cotton emerged, even as field trials that were to decide whether India would opt GM crops were still underway. In March 2002, the GEAC ended up approving Bt cotton for commercial cultivation in India. To this day, no liability was fixed for the illegal spread which presented a fait accompli to the regulators.

Once the GM genie is out of the bottle, there could no going back. The genetic core of food crops will have been irreversibly changed. Lead petitioner in the Supreme Court for a moratorium on GM crops **Aruna Rodrigues** says,

“This technology is a classic case of ‘unforeseeable systemic ruin’, which means that we will know we are ruined after it happens. As they say, the dead cannot make a comeback.”

The [CGMFI says](#):

“The regulatory system in the country is in tatters. Incident after incident shows that with the current regulatory regime, citizens’ interests cannot be protected. If the regulators had acted decisively in the past with severe deterrence against illegal Bt cotton and later HT cotton cultivation and other illegal imports of GM foods, this situation could have been prevented. The government has to think of a serious overhaul of the entire set-up and significant improvements in the inter-agency coordination are required to ensure that no illegal GM cultivation or sales takes place in the country.”

It continues:

“GM HT soy cultivation in other countries is well documented to cause numerous problems—agri-chemical usage increase, soil health effects, impact on beneficial organisms like bees and monarch butterflies, health impacts from glyphosate used on the HT crop, increase in resistant ‘super weeds’, farmers caught in the trap of proprietary/patented treadmill technologies and decrease in yields. In India, the additional socio-economic issue of huge employment loss for poor agricultural household by the deployment of herbicide-tolerant seed technology is also an important matter of concern. Numerous official committees have repeatedly recommended against the introduction of such HT crops in the country, keeping all of this in mind.”

There are strong calls to make seed suppliers and regulators legally liable.

Certain pro-GMO activists want to celebrate the current state of affairs, saying that farmers have taken the decision to act in favour of GM crops in response to official dithering caused by the anti-GMO faction in India. This position says as much about their contempt for democracy and democratic procedures as it does for their ignorance of the reality of farming in India.

Professor Glenn Stone [has noted](#) where GM cotton has been concerned, any decision by farmers to plant GM seeds was not necessarily based on objective decision-making. There was no experimentation or the testing of seeds within agroecological contexts by farmers as has been the case traditionally. Farmers found themselves at the mercy of seed vendors who sold whatever seed they had in stock, regardless of what the farmers wanted. Without agricultural support services from trusted non-governmental organisations, farmers had to depend on local shopkeepers. They believed they were buying the latest and best seeds and created a rush on whatever supplies were available.

In other words, traditional knowledge, testing and evaluations by farmers in the field has been undermined or has broken down and seems to have given way to an unregulated industry-orchestrated free for all. All the more alarming now that we are dealing with HT crops and the possible runaway use of dangerous biocides.

Given the failure to win the debate on GM and the [democratic pushback](#) against this technology, isn’t the current situation what the GM agritech industry has wanted all along? After all, it [wouldn’t be the first time that the not-so-hidden hand](#) of powerful agri sector players has set out to [profit from the destruction of Indian agriculture](#).

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