

GMO Food Crops in India: BJP Government Grants the “Green Light” to Monsanto and the Biotech Conglomerates

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The Indian government is facing strong opposition for its decision to allow field trials of genetically modified (GM) crops. The Coalition for a GM-Free India is calling the approvals ‘hasty’ and has asked the Minister for Environment, Forests & Climate Change to cancel them.

Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM) is the economic wing of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – the parent body of the BJP party. It has termed the decision of the Narendra Modi BJP central government as a “betrayal of people’s trust.”

Ashwani Mahajan, All India co-convener of SJM says:

“SJM has received the news reports of approval of field trials of GM food crops by Genetically Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), under the Union Ministry of Environment & Forest, with shock, disbelief and anguish.”

The GEAC has reportedly approved 60 out of 70 applications for the field trials of GM crops, despite the Supreme Court appointed Technical Expert Committee (TEC) already having submitted its report based on sound science and factual data that strongly recommends the stopping of all such field trials [1].

A statement by the SJM reads:

“People of India who have elected BJP to power are feeling deceived. They had voted BJP to power on the promises the party made to the people of India in its manifesto 2014 and speeches made by the leaders during the election campaign.”

The BJP had promised in its election manifesto that GM food will not be allowed without evaluation of its long-term effects.

The statement continues:

“SJM wants to remind the government that moratorium on open field trials of GM food crops was the result of long and difficult struggle by people of India including Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, farmers, scientific experts, consumers, activists and other stakeholders. The Supreme Court of India has also been of the clear view that no hasty decision in this regard shall be taken that puts the

health of people and soil at risk.”

During the previous government, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, which included seven members from BJP, also recommended against the trial of GM crops.

The Coalition for a GM-Free India says:

“When most countries around the world are not adopting this risky technology which has a large number of attendant risks to health, environment, and livelihoods, and when several credible official bodies in India have asked for a stopping of field trials, it is extremely irresponsible that our apex biotechnology regulator has thrown such caution to the winds to approve open air field trials.”

Despite election promises, the Modi-led government has signaled its intention of fast-tracking GM technology, despite the TEC recommendations and two reports by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture advocating a moratorium and adequate regulatory structures free from conflicts of interest, independent scientific expertise and rigorous scientific studies be implemented.

The prevailing structures are based on too cosy a relationship between compliant bureaucrats and the biotech industry [2], which has in any case already been granted a firm strategic hold over agricultural policy and research in India [3].

The GMO biotech sector’s smokescreen of benevolence

The often-made claim is that GMOs are required to feed India’s huge population. The profit-driven biotech sector which seeks monopolistic control over the world’s food [4] often likes to hide behind a smokescreen of benevolence. Dilnavaz Variava has worked for a range of organizations, including the World Wildlife Fund India, where she was chief executive, and the Bombay Natural History Society. She has also served on several federal government committees as well as one in Maharashtra for the development of agriculture. She says:

“A World Bank commissioned study found that agro-ecological approaches and not GM provide the best solution to the world’s food crisis. In March 2011, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food also reported that small scale farmers could double food production within five to ten years by agro-ecological farming. An Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India study for West Bengal found that organic farming could increase net per capita income of a farmer in the state by 250 percent, lead to wealth accumulation of 120 billion rupees (\$1.9 billion), generate exports worth 5.5 billion rupees (\$87 million) and create nearly two million employment opportunities over five years. In Andhra Pradesh, Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture was started in 2005-06. It promoted ecologically and economically sound agriculture with state government and World Bank support. About 10,000 villages with one million farmers practice non-pesticidal management on over 3.5 million acres. Pesticide use in the state has decreased by more than 45 percent. Net income increases were 3,000 to 15,000 rupees per acre, in addition to meeting a household’s food needs.” [5]

She also claims that in places where GMOs have been adopted, food insecurity has risen:

“Macroeconomic data for the largest adopters of GM food indicate the opposite. In the U.S., food insecurity has risen from 12 percent in pre-GM 1995 to 15 percent in 2011. In Paraguay, where nearly 65 percent of land is under GM crops, hunger increased from 12.6 percent in 2004-06 to 25.5 percent in 2010-12. In Brazil and Argentina, GM food has not reduced hunger. In any event, GM does not increase yields, as the Union of Concerned Scientists established through a review of 12 years of GM in the US.”

This is of little concern to the powerful biotech lobby and its compliant bureaucrats and politicians. Money talks and wealth buys political influence. That much is as true in the US [6] as it appears to be increasingly the case in India, where the story of GMOs is one of gross violations, conflicts of interest and blatant disregard of biosafety norms [7].

Notes

- [1] <http://www.countercurrents.org/rodrigues120813.htm>
- [2] <http://www.dnaindia.com/analysis/editorial-dnaedit-tearing-hurry-2004462>
- [3] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/monsanto-controls-both-the-white-house-and-the-us-congress/5336422>
- [4] <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/07/26/monsanto-seeks-to-control-worlds-food/>
- [5] <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2013/09/22/gm-crops-wont-solve-indias-food-crisis/>
- [6] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/monsanto-controls-both-the-white-house-and-the-us-congress/5336422>
- [7] <http://indiagminfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/FTs-of-GMOs-kk-biosafety-course.pdf>

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