

SAY NO TO Bt Brinjal : SAY NO to Release of Genetically Modified Crops in India

Participate in the Public Consultation to be held by

Shri. Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests (i/c)

On

Saturday the 6th February 2010

**At Jnana Jyothi Auditorium, Central College Campus, Palace Road,
Near State Bank of Mysore Circle, Bangalore-560001**

Time: 10.00 am -2.00 pm

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) include crops that are modified by inserting gene/s from any other organism - plant, animal or microorganism. Such modification is undertaken on the presumption that it would enhance desirable properties or create new favourable characteristics. In agriculture, a major part of this technology is deployed to evolve resistance to specific diseases or pests or allow greater use of chemical herbicides for weed control.

In India, GM technology has been employed in cultivation of Bt Cotton which claims enhanced resistance to attacks by bollworm. This has been done by using a gene of *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a soil bacterium, and inserting it into Cotton plant. Now a similar technique is promoted for Brinjal cultivation, where the inserted gene makes the genetically modified Bt Brinjal plant to produce a toxic protein to attack a specific pest – stem and fruit borer [*Leucinodes orbonalis* (Guen.)].

In India, commercial release of Bt Brinjal has been approved following a controversial and unscientific decision on 14th October 2009 by Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), the regulatory authority for transgenic crops set up by the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

Release of GMOs is also a matter of litigation in the Supreme Court and Parliamentarians have warned of devastating consequences to farmers and consumers in India. As a result, the Indian Environment and Forests Minister Mr. Jairam Ramesh has been forced to withhold the approval subjecting a final decision to a series of public consultations across India. These consultations will now form the basis to decide whether GMO foods, like Bt Brinjal, should at all be released into India. This would constitute the first ever release of GMO food in India.

There is extensive evidence demonstrating that GM crops and foods cause adverse impacts on human and animal health, and also on the environment. In addition, it seriously compromises farmers' and consumers' socio-political and economic rights and also cultural norms. Experts warn that Genetically Modified crops, especially of food, significantly increase health risks, cause crop failures, contribute to loss of agricultural and natural biodiversity, and seriously erode livelihood choices.

GEAC has cleared this under an outdated legal framework (Rules and Procedures for the manufacture, import, use, research and release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) as well as products made by the use of such organisms, 1989). This clearance will subordinate the lives and livelihoods of Indians to Multinational Corporations who will control what India eats in the future.

This fundamentally violates our Rights enshrined in the Constitution. That Legislatures and the Parliament have not had opportunities to meaningfully debate and discuss the issues and implications of this stupendous decision is a testimony to the in-transparency and undemocratic nature of the current decision making process leading to the approval of Bt Brinjal for commercial cultivation by GEAC. The Principle of Prior and Informed Consent which protects the rights of farmers and consumers to be involved in the decision making process is marked by its complete absence.

It comes as a refreshing change therefore that India's Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh has subjected a final decision on Bt Brinjal to a series of Public Consultations that he is personally conducting across India. The last one will be held in Bangalore on 6th February, and this will help shape the decision that will be formulated by Union Government on whether or not to allow Bt Brinjal for commercial cultivation.

Mr. Sharad Pawar, Union Agriculture Minister, has been quite upset about these consultations and quite shockingly contested their legality arguing that the GEAC's word is final. Prompting Mr. Ramesh to respond that "...you will agree that in a democracy like ours, we have to take decisions that have far-reaching consequences with the greatest degree of caution, with the greatest degree of transparency and after ensuring that all stakeholders have been heard to their satisfaction. This is what I have sought to ensure ever since the GEAC recommendations reached me."

It is critical that a decision that fundamentally affects consumption of life sustaining food is not taken under duress of any sort. It has to be a sound, ethical, scientific, culturally acceptable and informed decision. The Public Consultations being held by Mr. Jairam Ramesh are a good first step in this process. It is important that this process is strengthened so that we move fully and meaningfully in formulating an unprecedented decision that certainly involves Local Governments, Legislatures and the Parliament.

**Right to safe choices of what you eat lies with you.
This is your critical chance to decide against allowing GMO foods in India.
Don't let Multinational Corporations control what you eat and thus your life itself.
Do come with your family and friends to the Public Consultation.**

Tell as many people as you can—people you know or those you can reach out to—about Bt brinjal and its very significant risks to our health, environment and our economy.

For more information log on to: <http://www.indiagminfo.org/> - for All information on GM in India; <http://www.iamnolabrat.com/> - for all campaigns related information for GM free India; <http://gmfreekarnataka.wordpress.com/>; Resource on Safe Food <http://www.safefoodnow.org/>

Endorsed by

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