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Will they vote out democracy and vote in Corpocracy?

The dangerous designs of India's biotech peddlers

AN OPEN LETTER TO MR SHARAD PAWAR, UNION MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.

--p v satheesh, Director, Deccan Development Society, Hyderabad

The petition from the Foundation for Biotechnology Awareness and Education, addressed to you demanding a reversal of the moratorium on Bt Brinjal is a pernicious piece of advocacy. What it actually requests you is to vote out democracy and vote in corporate control. That the FABE has the gumption to describe one of the most open, transparent, democratic and participatory exercises in India since independence, as the victory of decibel levels points to the utter contempt this organization, which is a front for the genetic industry, has for democratic processes. That the overwhelming majority of the people in Europe, Africa, Asia and parts of Latin America who constitute more than 95% of the world population have refused to eat genetically engineered foods has been completely hidden from you by pseudo scientists such as Dr Kameswara Rao in their appeal,. It may also be a sobering thought if we can find out how many scientists participated in the nationwide exercise undertaken by the MoEF to ascertain the truth about Bt Brinjal. At least some of the major scientists such as Dr P M Bhargava [father of microbiology and biotechnology in India] and Prof Swaminathan were not convinced that Bt Brinjal will do any good to Indian farmers or food consumers.

Mr Minister, as a Member of Parliament representing the farmers of India, you would be shocked to learn that Dr Kameswara Rao, in a forum on biotechnology held in Tirupati, AP, a few years ago, had openly declared that Indian farmers do not know how to grow cotton!! Now he is saying that Indian people do not know how to eat food. Both these outrageous statements have been made because the Indian farmers had then refused to be snared by the Bt Cotton and the Indian consumers have now totally rejected GE foods. The supposed anxiety he exhibits for the poor farmers could put a crocodile to shame. The singular concern that Dr Rao and his FBAE is for the profits of their paymasters, Monsanto and other biotech companies, and nothing else. All claims to the increased yields. reduced pesticide use etc. is an unadulterated lie. The mounting evidence of the failure of GE crops in many parts of the world tells you another truth far different from Dr Rao's lie. Even in the USA, the home of GE crops, according to the statistics released by the USDA itself, between 1995 and 2001, when the GE crops ruled the roost on the US farms, not a single ounce of pesticide use came down even while the global pesticide use was showing a declining trend in pesticide use. As far as crop yields were concerned, soybeans, a major

target of the GE industry, the yields actually declined from 42 Bushels/acre to 39.5 Bushels/acre between 1994 and 2009!

The story of Bt cotton on Indian farmland is a cloak and dagger story of how the seed industry led aggression of Monsanto, formed itself into a cartel and denied non Bt cotton seeds to the Indian farmer. Our multilocational studies over the last six years in Andhra Pradesh as well as many other studies by respected scientists in Karnataka and Vidarbha have illustrated how farmers, especially the small and the poor, the beneficiaries of Dr Rao's crocodile tears, have suffered extraordinary losses, damages to their health and their soil and have lost their livestock to the toxic effect of Bt Cotton. Hundreds of farmers both in the Warangal District of Andhra Pradesh and in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra had to end their lives by committing suicides. This is the reality of the **multiple benefits** that Bt cotton has brought on the small farmers of India. In fact the genetic engineering industry has designed its own epistemology to explain away this situation. They say that the small farmers **cannot cope with this technology**. Then how big should a farmer be to **cope** with the GE technology? Monsanto's own study in Argentina fixed it as a **minimum holding of 75 hectares!**. Respected Minister, would we want all the less than 75 hectare holding farmers pariahs of farming? If we did so, 99% of Indian farmers should not farm GE at all. And that would be good for Indian agriculture. Please listen to what Chief T A Buthalezi of Makathini, South Africa, told me in filmed interview. Please remember that Chief Buthalezi is the posterboy of Monsanto which has used him to internationally tomtom how Bt cotton has helped the poor in South Africa. But when I challenged Buthalezi to open his heart and tell me how as a farmer leader, he felt Bt crops could serve farmers, he thought deeply and told me: "Unless you have 20-30 hectares of farmland, you will not be helped by Bt Cotton."

This is the reality of GE science Mr Minister. Dr Rao says that GE has the support of over 560 scientists across the world. For every scientist who has endorsed this, there are ten scientists who have been pointing to the hazards of GE foods. They not only include crop scientists, but also a whole range of medical scientists, nutritionists, ecological scientists. It would be a sobering thought for Dr Rao and his ilk if they A recent report by the Union of Concerned Scientists, a very large body of scientists from across the globe, demonstrates that **GM crops don't increase crop yields**. Millions of dollars spent in Kenya by USAID and Monsanto over two decades to develop a virus-resistant sweet potato failed to deliver anything useful for farmers. After 14 years and \$6 million, local varieties vastly outperformed their genetically modified cousins in field trials. Even the success stories of Bt Cotton that are peddled by Monsanto in India are manufactured by the industry and not supported by science. A major study conducted by the Hannover University in the Haveri District of Karnataka clearly pointed to falling incomes of Bt cotton farmers in comparison with non Bt Cotton farmers. [ASHOK MALKARNEKAR, DIEMUTH PEMSL, HERMANN WAIBEL University of Hannover, Development and Agricultural Economics, Germany]

I have conducted personal interviews in the Warangal District of AP wherein farmers have reported that the *Raasi* cotton they had planted in 2000 had given them yields upto 14 qtls/acre vis a vis 10 qtls/acre yield they got in 2004 when they planted *Raasi Bt cotton* seeds. The same trend is reported by a Nebraska University study in 2007 which reported a yield loss of between 7% and 11% for GE Soy in comparison with the best non GE hybrids that the farmers planted. A year later Kansas University reported that its studies had confirmed that pre GE soy yields were 10% higher than GE soy yields. The same story was repeated with regard to GE maize, cotton and canola. The biotech brigade such as Dr Rao and his company has worked very hard to conceal these truths from the world. And therefore Mr Minister, please do not let yourself or your Ministry be misled by the repeated lies of these corporate scientists.

As far as the health impacts are concerned listen to the American Academy of Environmental Medicine (AAEM) which last year called on “Physicians to educate their patients, the medical community, and the public to avoid GM (genetically modified) foods when possible and provide educational materials concerning GM foods and health risks.” **They called for a moratorium on GM foods, long-term independent studies, and labeling.** AAEM’s position paper stated, “Several animal studies indicate serious health risks associated with GM food,” including infertility, immune problems, accelerated aging, insulin regulation, and changes in major organs and the gastrointestinal system. **They conclude, “There is more than a casual association between GM foods and adverse health effects. There is causation,”** as defined by recognized scientific criteria. Therefore Mr Minister, the FBAE is actually spinning a fable when it tells you that GE foods are safe and is actually misleading you.

In terms of environmental impact, the GE industry has consistently spread the untruth that GE crops neither contaminate other crops nor do they harm the environment. The truth is on the other side. Over years, the incidences of GE crops contaminating the non GE crops and their wild relatives is a widely known fact. In fact, the shamelessness of the GE industry was evident when Syngenta a top biotech corporate announced that it had manufactured a contamination detection and decontamination kit for use by farmers. If GE crops do not contaminate at all why then must Syngenta take the great trouble of producing and marketing a decontamination kit? Dr Rao is also famous for similar obfuscation of truth. In the Tirupati public meeting he said a blatant lie that crop pollens become sterile if they cross a distance of a few meters! This is the kind of science he and his FBAE peddles, Mr Minister. Beware of them.

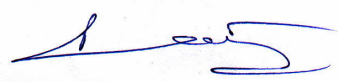
Our own personal experience after five years of consistent community based research on Bt cotton in three districts of Andhra Pradesh have pointed out to three consistent trends:

- a) Increasing soil toxicity, which started at 0 levels in 2002 and spread to 40% of all Bt cotton planted soils resulting in root rot disease. This meant that 40% of all Bt cotton planted soils had turned toxic within five years. [While the biotech brigade pooh poohed these results, a recent study called **Detection of transgenic *cp4 epsps* genes in the soil food web** by Miranda M et al published in the international journal *Agronomy for Sustainable Agriculture* unequivocally states that *in a field of Roundup Ready corn, we quantified the presence of the transgene for glyphosate tolerance within a soil food web. Using quantitative real-time PCR, we identified the cp4 epsps transgene in bulk soil microarthropods, nematodes, macroarthropods and earthworms sampled within the corn cropping system. We found evidence of the transgene at all dates and in all animal groups.* This is a clear evidence that transgenes move from plants to soil flora and affect them.]
- b) A worrying trend of death of cattle was reported in 2003. Despite our appeals to national institutions such as the National Institute of Nutrition, the government abdicated its responsibility to conduct any scientific research into this phenomenon. Disgusted, we did our own small scale research by stall feeding three groups of sheep, two with Bollgard 1 and Bollgard 2 crop residues and one group non Bt cotton crops. At the end of 13th week, all the sheep fed on Bt residues died while the non Bt fed sheep stayed alive and healthy.
- c) Hundreds of cotton pickers reported skin allergies and breathing problems after working in Bt fields, a disease they had never encountered in non Bt fields. This is very well documented on video and in writing.

Then comes the question of super weeds. Tens of instances have been recorded when weeds which become resistant to the Weedicides produced by the GE industry have come to the surface over the last ten years. Such incidents have even forced the normally GE friendly US Supreme Court to hear arguments involving a federal judge's temporary ban on a breed of pesticide resistant Alfalfa. Even as I write this mail to you the US Supreme Court is poised to hear these arguments in what will be a landmark judgement on GE in that country. [Mr Minister, you probably might remember that GE industry had transported a dozen or more US senators to India in 2003 to ostensibly take part in the National Science Congress. But their actual mandate was to meet and convince Indian Supreme Court judges about the new adjudication they have made with regard to the biotech litigations they might face. The Senators, as reported by the leading Food Policy Analyst Dr Devendar Sharma, offered to host a string of workshops in the USA for Indian judges so that their thinking is as genetically modified as the judges in the US of A. Therefore the tentacles of the GE industry is as widespread and as dangerous as the seeds and chemicals they produce. They even create a judicial environment that will be favourable them in crunch time]

Therefore Mr Minister, we need to tread with great caution. On GE the only caution we must exercise is to be constantly vigilant against the corporate science that constantly tries to push the envelope no matter in the process they subvert principles of science or the principles of democracy. We must let them know that Indian democracy is vibrant because of its decibel levels and its relentless fight for truth. It is not a dimpled ballot democracy such as the USA where GOP friendly judges can elect the President of the country and defeat their people.

With warm regards



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To

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Consult scientists, not public, on Bt brinjal, Pawar told

Bt brinjal is safe, scientists aver GM crops grown on over 125 million ha

Bangalore: More than 540 scientists from India and around the world have signed a petition urging Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar to “explore ways to reverse” the moratorium on the commercialisation of Bt brinjal in India.

Describing the moratorium by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) as an “anti-science decision,” the petition says that genetically modified (GM) food has been consumed by hundreds of millions of people for 15 years now without any harm to human health or the environment. The petition was drafted by the Foundation for Biotechnology Awareness and Education (FBAE).

“Bt brinjal has been given the all-clear by the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee. But Jairam Ramesh has based his decision on public opinion and not on scientific reason,” said C. Kameswara Rao, executive secretary of FBAE, at a press conference here on Friday.

The petition urged the Minister to “consult leading scientific academies of India” on GM crop technology and Bt brinjal. The Indian scientific community is overwhelmingly in support of Bt brinjal. The MoEF's decision has ramifications beyond Bt brinjal as it “has sent a powerful message to the world that India's decisions on matters of science and technology will not be made on the basis of science and biosafety, but on the decibel strengths of ideologically motivated, anti-science activists,” states the petition. The MoEF “appears to see no urgency in delivering the fruits of modern biotechnology to poor farmers.”

Increased yield

GM crops are now planted on more than 125 million hectares in India and other countries and have been shown to increase crop yields, reduce the use of agrochemicals, and improve the nutritive quality of foods, says the plea. Several countries, including the U.S., have approved GM crops for commercial cultivation.