

# Coalition for a GM-Free India

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To:

August 8, 2013

Dr Manmohan Singh,

Prime Minister of India.

Respected Sir,

**Sub: Concerns regarding the threat to India's seed sovereignty - Urging the government to ensure that such sovereignty is actively protected - reg.**

Greetings! We introduce ourselves as a large, vibrant and informal national network called Coalition for a GM-Free India, consisting of around 250 organisations drawn from more than 20 states of India, working to create an informed debate on modern biotechnology/transgenics in our food and farming systems and environment. The network also seeks to ensure that farmer-controlled, safe and affordable solutions exist for production related problems and productivity enhancement in agriculture. The network consists of farmers' unions, consumer groups, environmental and women's organizations, civil society groups promoting ecological farming on the ground, seed savers' networks, many concerned citizens, and members drawn from the scientific community spanning different disciplines and so on.

We come to you today from a large gathering of thousands of citizens from 20 states, who have assembled on the Parliament Street, to demand that GMOs, BRAI, Monsanto....Quit India. This assembly has gathered here, to oppose the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India (BRAI) Bill 2013, which is deeply flawed with its promotional objective around modern biotechnology and will only serve the interests. **We are urging the government to withdraw this Bill.** We are also here to express our rejection of GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms) in our food, farming and environment given that this is a living, imprecise, unpredictable, irreversible and uncontrollable technology, which has no relevance for India. We also demand that corporations like Monsanto, which are making huge inroads into Indian agriculture, largely due to the regulatory and programmatic support that they receive in our country, should quit India. This assumes special significance in the context of Monsanto voluntarily withdrawing from Europe, recognising the public rejection of transgenics there. Indians cannot be treated with double standards by corporations like Monsanto, and we are not lab rats in a huge irresponsible experiment with our food, farming and environment in the form of transgenics.

Sir, we would like to explain to you why we are so deeply concerned about **our Seed.**

India's **seed diversity** is an important part of our farming culture and a national wealth that is a result of cumulative innovations, adaptations and selections by many generations of farming communities. India is a centre of diversity and origin of rice, and is known for its tens of

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thousands of varieties of paddy. This diversity has immediate implications for the livelihoods of millions, needless to say. It has greater relevance than ever before in the context of climate change – diversity-based farming is a major adaptation and even mitigation strategy in this context. This diversity, which it will not be an exaggeration to call as the very basis of Life, will be endangered by transgenic seeds.

Further, our **seed sovereignty** is an integral part of our food security and sovereignty. As one Minister in your government rightly said, seed is as much a matter of sovereignty as space or defence! Seed being handed over to multinational corporations, that too to corporations like Monsanto which are notorious for their monopolistic tendencies and operations, is disastrous for the livelihoods of millions in India.

It has been seen in Europe through a recent study that farmers in countries that grow GM crops have found their **seed choices dwindle**, while farmers in countries that do not grow GM crops have seen their seed choices increase. This can be seen in our own country where today 95% of the cotton grown in this country is reported to be Bt cotton, and within this, around 93% cotton seed market is controlled by Monsanto; it is the proprietary technology of Monsanto that has been used in dozens of cotton seed brands. While Monsanto may not have any patents on this branded seed in India by law, in reality, a contamination of a public sector cotton seed with Monsanto's "event" resulted in the withdrawal of this seed from the market. It has been seen elsewhere that Monsanto's sub-licensing agreements of its technology have inbuilt clauses which dwindle seed choices for farmers. We cannot allow this here.

A report called Seed Giants Vs. US Farmers (2013) clearly outlines the role of Genetic Engineering in allowing corporations to **consolidate their market takeover of seed** in the USA (where biotech corporations claim comprehensive rights to GE plants by virtue of inserting single genes), and the resultant curbing of rights of farmers, to the extent that hundreds of farmers have been sued and jailed by corporations like Monsanto, for their "crime" of saving seed or re-sowing or even contaminated crops, where Monsanto's proprietary genes end up in the fields of non-GM growing farmers! As of December 2012, Monsanto had filed 142 **alleged seed patent infringement lawsuits** involving 410 farmers and 56 small farm businesses in 27 states. Sums awarded to Monsanto in 72 recorded judgements total more than 23 million US dollars. As early as 2003, Monsanto had a department of 75 employees with a budget of \$10 million for the sole purpose of **pursuing farmers for patent infringement**.

Further, it has been well-documented that the concentration of seed markets in the hands of corporations like Monsanto has allowed them to not only reduce seed choices and availability of affordable, diverse seed, but also **increase seed prices exorbitantly**. Seed prices have risen dramatically in those crops in which patented GE seeds have been introduced – corn, soybean, cotton, for example. The average cost of soybean seed to plant one acre has risen by a dramatic 325 percent, from \$13.32 to \$56.58. Similar is the case for corn and cotton. In cotton, the increase has been 516% from 1995-2011. Clearly, this has a direct impact on farmers' livelihoods. In India too, the entry of Bt cotton witnessed a 4-fold increase in cotton seed price. It took several efforts on the legal front by state governments like the Congress-ruled Andhra Pradesh government to make cotton seed affordable and within the reach of farmers.

It is not only seed choices of farmers that get affected. Once again, if we look at the experience of USA, innovation has also been stifled in agri-research in the name of IPRs. Prominent scientists across several American Universities had to write to the EPA (Environment Protection Agency) to express their alarm at restrictions on scientific research.

Meanwhile, the contamination potential of GM crops will mean that informed choices will be taken away forever from both farmers and consumers, once these are released into the environment.

It is also of alarm that Monsanto operates with great impunity, especially given the lax pro-industry regulatory regime that exists in our country. In India, the defiance with which they have sued even state governments including in instances where they had a liability agreement with a state government in the case of seed failure, is a matter of grave concern. State governments have been challenged on their authority to regulate seed prices. The fact that it took a Supreme Court order to get biosafety data - that was being guarded as confidential commercial information - to be brought out into the public domain for public scientific scrutiny is reflective of the secretive ways in which the biotech industry wants to function, to protect their bottomline of profits.

So, our concerns with regard to Genetic Engineering and our seed sovereignty and the threat from corporations like Monsanto have to be understood in the context of predictable practical implications for seed choices, seed prices, threat to farmers apriori rights and criminalisation of farmers and stifling of scientific research in addition to threat to agro-diversity.

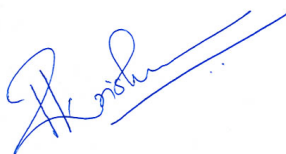
It is important to note that the cotton which was used as a symbol of our struggle for independence is now in the hands of an American multinational "Monsanto". On the eve of Quit India Day, on August 8<sup>th</sup> 2013, thousands have gathered in Delhi from around the country to ensure that our seed sovereignty is not further threatened. Their call is for GMOs, BRAI, Monsanto....(and other such corporations) to quit India.

Sir, we give you this non-Monsanto organic Indian flag as a symbol of sovereignty, and urge you to hoist this flag on this upcoming Independence Day. This would assure concerned citizens of this country that our seed sovereignty which is an issue of national pride will not be endangered by corporations like Monsanto with their controversial technologies and that the government is conscious of the need to uphold our seed sovereignty.

Yours Sincerely,



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