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Respected Sir,

22 September 2016

This is with regard to GM mustard, which is a controversial genetically modified crop, which if approved will become the first GM food crop to be allowed for cultivation in India. Six years ago, when Btbrinjal was put under an indefinite moratorium, the Government of India's decision note clearly asked for more comprehensive and long term testing to be done, and rightly so, to ascertain its safety to the satisfaction of scientists and citizens alike. After all, we cannot afford to jeopardise our citizens' health from the very food that we eat to stay alive and healthy. This is the reason, apart from various environmental and other socio-economic risks that accompany GM crops, that most countries in the world do not allow GM crops to be cultivated. Many nations have clear bans in fact.

Years later, going by various reports that I was able to access, rather than bring in improvements in the regulatory regime and make it more rigorous, credible and reliable, the government has allowed the regulatory system to deteriorate further. GM mustard has received a safety clearance from a technical panel of experts in the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee and it is apparent that the testing is inadequate. Importantly, there is no data in the public domain by which any independent verification of the safety certificate can be ascertained for its rigour and dependability. There are also reports that the one health safety expert put into the technical panel represents a conflict of interest that should not have been there, and is also someone who did not participate in the assessment processes. Quite apart from this is the fact that GM mustard underwent very little testing on the health front.

Arguments that India is already consuming imported GM canola oil are not a justification for allowing GM mustard cultivation. In fact, such an argument is outrageously unscientific and dismissive of many unanswered questions on this GM mustard. Our consumption of imported GM oil is quite low, and we should not have allowed this in the first instance without proper long term testing for impacts. Consuming highly imported oil cannot be equated with safety of consumption of more direct consumption of leaves, seeds, mustard paste etc., by both humans and animals if we allow cultivation within India. Further, domestic cultivation on the grounds that we are importing ignores a very important dimension of such a cultivation – of environmental and health impacts of a herbicide tolerant GM crop, in addition to socio-economic issues of labour displacement, seed sovereignty, choices for farmers and consumers etc.

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I had written to the Union Health Minister Mr JP Nadda in November 2015 and pointed out that there is absolutely no need for opting for this unsafe technology since non-GM better performing hybrids and varieties exist. In fact, the very basis on which this GM mustard is being pushed – its yield superiority – has not even been verified by the regulators.

When Btbrinjal was being debated for approval in India, as the then Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare, I had ensured that the health ministry and its officials took a rigorous, pro-people and pro-science stand and I expect the Government of India to do the same with GM mustard, given that mustard is more widely grown and consumed and in more ways than Brinjal. If we want to protect citizens' health and environment, this GM mustard should not be approved at all, and I urge you to intervene urgently and make sure that it is not permitted to be grown in

Thanking you.

With Warm Regards

(Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss MP)

To:

Hon'ble Shri Narendra Modi ji,
Prime Minister of India,
Government of India
New Delhi

Copy:

Hon'ble Shri J P Nadda, Minister for Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, Nirman Bhawan, New Delhi

Hon'ble Shri Anil Madhav Dave, Minister for Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of India