

# 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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**

## **Why are we discussing Bt Brinjal today:**

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 aid in enhancing desirable properties or create new characteristics. In agriculture, a major part of this technology is deployed to evolve resistance to specific diseases or pests.

In India, GM technology has been employed in cultivation of Bt Cotton which claims enhanced resistance to attacks by bollworms. 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 by allowing commercial release of Bt Brinjal on the claims of resistance to stem and fruit borer [*Leucinodes orbonalis* (Guen.)]. This is on the basis of a controversial decision of Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), the regulatory authority for transgenic crops set up by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, during October 2009. This decision was taken within days of a report submitted by an "Expert Committee - II" that was "developed" by Mahyco – the company intending to release Bt Brinjal in India. If this decision is concurred by the Ministry, Bt Brinjal would become the very first introduction of genetically modified food in India.

It is beyond doubt that the expert committee report approved by GEAC has overlooked some very serious concerns and risks to human and animal safety, to biodiversity and the environment at large. Further, it has followed deficient procedures and rules that favour and benefit only large Transnational Biotech and Agricultural Companies. Thereby, the GEAC has violated transparent, fair, independent and scientific enquiry norms which was a minimum requirement of an apex regulatory body.

Shockingly many members of the GEAC were representatives of institutions promoting GM crops. This by itself should have disqualified all of them from participating in the apex and critical clearance body because of their vested interest. It is beyond doubt, therefore, that these very members have rushed the decision to introduce Bt Brinjal based on weak standards that ensure a race to bottom. This presents a huge risk to public health as there are many known and unknown devastating impacts on human health and the environment. As a result, there have been widespread protests against the release of Bt Brinjal.

A major contributor to this growing concern is the fact that GEAC has not at all conformed to the rigorous standards involved in scientific approval of such unprecedented food technologies. So serious are the concerns, that the issue of releasing GM food is a subject of litigation in the Supreme Court. Moreover leading scientists have expressed serious reservations over its release and many Parliamentarians have warned of devastating consequences to farmers in India. As a result, the Indian Environment and Forests Minister Mr. Jairam Ramesh has been forced to withhold the approval for commercial release of Bt Brinjal based on the GEAC clearance of 14<sup>th</sup> October 2009. Mr. Ramesh has confirmed that a final decision on the matter would be subject to a series of public consultations across India. These consultations will now apparently be the basis to decide whether GMO foods, like Bt Brinjal, should at all be released into India.

## **An overview of Bt Brinjal as a GMO:**

The release of genetically modified food for human consumption constitutes an unprecedented public health risk as it is based on an infant technology that has been developed intransparently and poorly tested. Once released, genetically modified organisms will remain largely uncontrolled and unregulated, thus causing unforeseeable consequences. World-over, GM foods have been a subject of intense controversy with growing opposition to

introduction of GM foods for consumption.

The advocates of GM crops, foods, meat and other products are big Multinational companies whose aim is to comprehensively control what you eat, drink or wear. GM foods, in particular, pose a risk to human health both because of direct consumption or/and indirectly through consumption of animals that have been fed with GM feeds, or even those animals/organisms that humans consume which are genetically modified.

Brinjal is an indigenous vegetable plant to India and home to a vast number of varieties. These varieties have been carefully selected by farmers based on hundreds of years of experience with their cultivation and consumption. Today, Brinjal contributes to almost 8% of vegetable production in India and is a widely consumed vegetable. If Bt Brinjal is released, there is a very high risk of cross contamination of natural varieties and could potentially wipe out many indigenous Brinjal varieties. In addition, there is very high risk that related species could also be contaminated irreversibly.

If we were to allow Bt Brinjal to pass through into commercial release, it will open the legal floodgates for the release genetically modified foods for the very first time in India. Already, rice and 56 other varieties of genetically modified foods such as Tomatoes, Potatoes, Corn, Ladies finger, Papaya, Mustard, etc. are in the pipeline awaiting clearance by GEAC. Considering the collusive nature of GEAC's decision making processes with companies and institutions promoting GMO, India could soon turn into a dumping ground for untested GM food crops.

**Think! Does the GEAC have the right to release modified organisms into the environment without assessing ALL the risks?**

The risks of GM foods are many and scientists have already revealed a very large number of adverse effects associated with the genetic engineering of plants, animals and microbes. *Research reveals that following exposure to GM foods, there is marked reduction in weight of key human organs, reduced overall growth, reduced fertility, adverse effects on immune functions, inflammation, mutations, allergic reactions and precancerous cell growth.*

Using GM seeds is not a sustainable farming practice and they are also outrageously expensive. GM crops currently designed are entirely based on industrialized and corporatised agricultural practices that are unsuitable to a labour surplus country like India. It is well possible that such technologies might displace and dislocate adversely affect the employment generation potential of farm labour, especially women who sustain homes and farming. The adverse impact of GM crops on agricultural biodiversity can significantly erode supplementary nutrition benefits that women derive from plants and herbs that they collect from fields. GM crops further compromise the strength of farmers as it could diminish diversity of beneficial soil flora and fauna – such as earthworms – which are farmers best friends.

GM crops will also increase risks of crop failure as it promotes monoculture cultivation. Traditional farming practices promote multicropping, even in small land holdings, thus providing a basic food and economic security against crop failures. Dependence on GM crops will completely eradicate this practice. As a result, farming communities will be exposed to the vagaries of seed supply chain mechanisms determined by stock markets and company directors. In effect this returns us back to pre-independence days when we were under the control of the East India Company.

#### **Loss of Seed Sovereignty and Biodiversity:**

Amongst the most dangerous impact of introducing GMO is that it can accelerate the rate at which traditional seeds are being lost. Cultural traditions and farming practices currently come together in aiding the conservation of endemic seeds from generation to generation. With GMO introduction, transnational corporations will ensure that this tradition is wiped out, thus exposing farmers to total dependence on profit seeking companies for supply of seeds every season.

GM agriculture could cause loss of agricultural and natural biodiversity, thus destroying our genetic heritage. As a consequence, such technologies have the potential of wiping out various varieties of plants. It may also result in the extinction of entire species. Introduction of GMO is thus considered a most significant risk to biodiversity of the world.

Using GM crops could suppress the growth of indigenous nutritional and medicinal plants in farmlands. As a result it may severely compromise the capacity of farmers to depend on such medicinal plants in attending to human and

veterinary health issues. Further, the loss of this critical biodiversity may affect the overall health of farm animals, as it depletes their capacity of finding nutrition and disease curing plants in natural settings.

Not only will seed sovereignty be totally compromised, but such GMO technologies could initiate a serious erosion of the quality of our health and environment .

### **Why your participation in the Public Consultation is critical:**

With such unprecedented risks before us, the Public Consultation to be held by Mr. Jairam Ramesh is a critical and probably the only chance to voice concerns against the introduction of GMO foods such as Bt Brinjal.

This is an opportunity to understand more about what will be your future menu and the risks such food and technologies will expose you and your family to in the very near future.

**What you eat and drink should be entirely your independent decision.  
Don't let corporations control, own and ruin your precious life.**

**Right to Safe Choices in What You Consume lies with You!  
This is your chance to defend your Fundamental Freedoms**

Come with your family and friends to the Public Hearing.

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 economy.



**SAY NO TO Bt BRINJAL**

### **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/> - for information on GM Free activities in Karnataka

<http://myrighttosafefood.blogspot.com/> - for My Right to Safe food campaign

<http://sumansahai-blog.blogspot.com> - for information on GM in India

<http://www.safefoodnow.org/> Resource on Safe Food

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