

Convenor**P V Satheesh***Deccan Development Society*

Hyderabad

Ph: 040 27764577, 27764722

ddshyderabad@gmail.com**Joint Convenors****Karnataka****Babu***ICRA*

Bangalore

Ph: 080 25283370,

icra@bgl.vsnl.net.in**Tamil Nadu****Oswald Quintal***KUDUMBAM*

Trichy

Ph: 0431 2331879, 2331842

kudumbamtry@eth.net**PRESS RELEASE**

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Expressing its “shock” at the development of transgenic sorghum [jowar] by the Indian Institute of Millet Research of Hyderabad, the Southern Action on Genetic Engineering has demanded a firm and unequivocal stand against GM sorghum by the Government of India and asked the government to clearly say that it will not approve GM sorghum.

The Southern Action on Genetic Engineering (SAGE) is a coalition of farmers, scientists, environmental activists and civil society groups from South India.

Saying that "this would have been funny if it was no so tragic" the SAGE in a letter addressed to the Union Minister for Environment and Forests, says that sorghum (Jowar) is a crop that offers complete food and nutritional security to the populations of dry land India and rich fodder for its cattle. Why has the Indian Institute of Millet Research (IIMR) refused to carry forward the rich traditions of Dryland India and take a serious look at the science of people's farming.

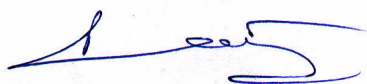
In their letter the SAGE blames IIMR for succumbing to the international temptations by the GM lobby. Tracing the roots of these temptations to the Global Food Security Act (which the SAGE terms as a “move to increase the global food insecurity”) passed by US senate in the year 2009 by setting aside a huge sum of over 7 billion dollars to support transgenic research in South Asia, the SAGE says that the IIMR research is a fallout of this attempt by the US to buy out Indian agricultural research. SAGE sees the recent development of GM Mustard by Delhi University and the development of GM Sorghum of IIMR as results of the Global Food Security Act.

"As to the issue of sorghum itself there is absolutely no reason to believe that it needs a GM protection to save itself" says the SAGE. The so called stem borer in sorghum to tackle which the IIMR has chosen the GM path, is hardly a problem for sorghum farmers says the letter to the Environment Minister. "Farmers find this problem so insignificant that they hardly use any pesticide spray or any other toxic method to combat it. Besides sorghum is the food of several million people in India more of who are poor and cannot afford a high nutritious diet offsets the toxicity of GM in their food. Sorghum and other millets provide this populations their health, nutritional and survival. Therefore allowing GM food in their diet would be a tragedy of monumental proportions" says the letter.

Drawing the attention of the Minister to the fact that sorghum fields host a fascinating tapestry of biodiversity the SAGE warns that an introduction of GM into these fields would signify the death of this biodiversity. The case of Mexico, the origin of maize biodiversity where an accidental introduction of GM Maize killed the maize diversity and created irreversible problems for the Mexican farmers must offer a clear lesson for India, says SAGE

Citing examples of the attempts by India's National Biodiversity Authority to block GM applications, SAGE demands that the government of India must defend the great world of diversity on Indian agricultural fields.

The letter demands that the government should say a "clear and firm NO to GM on sorghum".



PV Satheesh,
National Convener, Southern Action on Genetic Engineering (SAGE)
Director, Deccan Development Society

Enclosures: SAGE Letter to Minister for Environment & Forests
Sorghum Genetic Resources management <http://www.millets.res.in/dsr.php>
Media Coverage in Eenadu