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To,
Dr Harsh Vardhan,
Minister for Environment and Forest and Climate Change,
Government of India
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dr.harshvardhan@sansad.nic.in

Dear Dr Harsh Vardhanji,

First it was cotton. Then the net spread to Golden Rice. Then mustard. And now sorghum. The extremely strategic expansion of GM conspiracy is now out in the open.

As the Southern Action on Genetic Engineering (SAGE), a coalition of farmers, scientists, environmental activists and civil society groups from South India warned about 15 years ago, the introduction of Bt cotton was only a precursor to test policy waters in India and see how it responds to the entry of Bt into the farming landscape of this country.

India being a large nation GM industry is eyeing a huge market for itself. While European union has resolutely stood its grounds against GM crops, people's resistance has prevented a large scale expansion in Latin America. Africa has offered a stiff resistance to the introduction of GM Maize under the pretext of saving African lives. Therefore the GM industry had no other option but to focus on India.

In this context, It is quite extraordinary that an Institution such as the Indian Institute of Millet Research has come up with a variety of GM Sorghum (Jowar). This would have been funny if it was no so tragic. Sorghum is the crop of the poor in the dryland India offering them complete food and nutritional security and rich fodder to their cattle. Sorghum has centuries of history as a symbol of biodiverse agriculture in India as well as in Africa, that the IIMR has refused to carry forward these traditions and look into a science of people's farming and has succumbed to GM temptations is an enormous tragedy. But the roots of why this has happened is not far to see.

The Global Food Security Act (a move to increase global insecurity) adopted by the US Senate gives a clue to why IIMR has taken this step and why Delhi university has come up with a GM Mustard. These are two faces of the same coin. The Global Food Security Act was a response to the brave fight put up by the environmental groups in India and the unexpected support from the Government of India to their fight through its declaration of its Moratorium on Bt Cotton. Alarmed by this double set back the GM industry thought that the best option for it would be to introduce GM into India through India's own scientific institutions. This they thought might douse the passions of the nationalist lobby. Therefore GM is now coming to India through India's own national scientists. The Food Security Act had set aside a vast sum of over 7 billion dollars for GM research in South Asia and focused its efforts on India. We can obviously see the results now. Delhi University, Indian Institute of Millet Research , University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore and many other agricultural scientists are falling prey to this trap.

As to the issue of sorghum itself, there is absolutely no reason to believe that it needs a GM protective cover to save itself. The pest for which the GM intervention has been invented is hardly seen as a problem by the sorghum farmers in India. Farmers use no pesticide spray or any other toxic methods to combat this pest. Through simple indigenous biological control methods , farmers have kept this insignificant problem at bay for hundreds of years. Scientists estimate that it affects less than 5% of the sorghum cultivation.

Then why is IIMR making this look a big problem and bring in GM technology to combat it? Obviously the motivation comes from a global GM lobby that doesn't fail to capture a single opportunity to spread its tentacles. Sorghum is the food of several hundred million people of India, most of who are poor and cannot afford high nutrition in their diet. They completely rely on sorghum and other millets to provide them health, nutrition and survival. if GM is allowed into this world, it will be a tragedy of monumental proportions.

India's poor over the years have developed hundreds of varieties of sorghum on their fields to answer their food, nutrition and health issues. They do not need a GM intervention to topple their centuries old fascinating system nor are they ready to face a host of health problems such as autism, obesity, diabetes, blood pressure, heart attack etc. which are rampant in a GM fed country such as the USA.

Another major victim of GM sorghum would be the iconic biodiversity on sorghum fields. Sorghum in the fields of dryland India anchors a host of pulses, oil seeds, greens and other crops making it a phenomenal matrix of biodiversity. This rich tapestry of biodiversity would be severely affected if GM Sorghum is introduced. We can learn from the example of Mexico, the home of Maize diversity where an accidental introduction of GM Maize severely destroyed the Maize diversity.

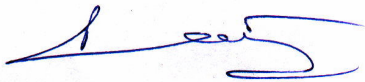
Agrobiodiversity is the soul of the life and farming of small and marginal farmers. Countries like the US where the minimum farm size extends to thousands of acres may be able to gamble with its diversity but countries like India where more than 70% of farmers live on less than a hectare of land can do so at their own peril. This is a factor which the National Biodiversity Authority has warned against time and again. The government of India would do well to defend its great world of diversity by saying a clear and firm 'no' to GM on sorghum.

In fact, many of these points are made in a submission by the government of India in Delhi High Court in a case called *GMO'S THREATEN FOOD SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT* a public interest litigation filed in the Supreme Court of India, the apex Indian legal court.

The Union Food Processing Minister Ms Harsimrat Kaur Badal has rightly and clearly said that GM Mustard has no place in Indian agriculture while complimenting her statement we would also like a similar, firm and unequivocal stand on GM sorghum from the government of India which should caution the IIMR from pursuing such reckless research and warn them that GM sorghum will never find an approval from government.

On behalf of SAGE we offer our advance congratulations for Government of India which we are sure will take a 'No GM in sorghum' stand.

With warm regards



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