

GREENPEACE Briefing

GE Brinjal: The Story So Far

2004-2006 – Monsanto- Mahyco conducts open air field trials for GE Brinjal in at least 26 locations for 8 hybrids across the country.

Early 2006 The DBT clears Monsanto- Mahyco's "limited field trials" for GE Brinjal. All the data from these trials are submitted to the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) for an approval to conduct "large scale field trials".

22nd May 2006: Monsanto Mahyco's makes a presentation to the GEAC in its 67th meeting. GEAC's response: Some additional studies may be undertaken by the Company in tandem with the large scale field trials.

13 June 2006 – Greenpeace activists dressed as cows and sheep, to highlight the death of 1600 cattle, sought an audience with the Minister of Agriculture Mr. Sharad Pawar to present a memorandum drawing his attention to the mysterious deaths of cattle in Warangal after feeding on the Bt Cotton field. The protest alerted the minister and citizens of the imminent threat of GE Brinjal as it carried the very same gene as the one on Bt Cotton. The activists demanded that no GE food crops must be approved under the circumstances and further tests to determine long term health effects of GE crops must be conducted.

July 2006: Greenpeace asks the GEAC under the Right to information act, 2005, to make public all data of the company's "limited field trials" to inform civil society generate an independent scientific opinion. On 29th May 2006, only the protocols of the tests conducted were made public and submissions from independent scientists and civil society were invited before the 17th of July. In response to Greenpeace's specific request on the data generated in these tests, the GEAC in an e-mail response says *"Further the detailed bio safety data generated by the Company is considered as a third party information. Your request to access the data was discussed in the GEAC meeting on 30.6.2006 wherein the Committee was of the view that the information that the NGOS /Public may be permitted to examine the report in the MoEF in the presence of a GEAC representative."*

On **July 10th**, The coalitions of farmers, comprising the Bharatiya Kissan Union in North India, Shetkari Sanghatan, Maharashtra, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Samithi (KRRS) in Karnataka and the Tamil Nadu Farmers Association demanded a total ban of GE open air large-scale field trials and particularly GE brinjal in a series of dharnas across the country.

17th July – Submissions from independent scientists, consumer groups, farmers organizations and other NGOs pour in stating their concerns on GE brinjal. The GEAC decides to set up an expert committee comprising of entomologists, geneticists, nutritionists and social scientists to review all the submissions.

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July 2006 The intended approval of Bt Brinjal by the GEAC prompts an appeal in the Supreme Court in continuation of the PIL filed in July 2005 in the Supreme Court for a moratorium pending a comprehensive biosafety protocol. Leading international scientists, many of whom have provided affidavits for the Court, are aghast at *abysmal standards in so-called biosafety studies*. Dr. Arpad Pusztai, the world renowned toxicologist and leading expert in protein lectins in a telephone conversation with Petitioner No 1, Aruna Rodrigues, said *that in all these years of scrutinising industry studies, he has never seen anything quite like this. make any assessment of the validity of their claims*". Dr. Robert Mann formerly senior lecturer in biochemistry at the University of Auckland and Advisor to successive Ministry's of Health in NZ, says, "I regard the 'Bt'-brinjal field-trial proposal as one of the most ill-conceived I have encountered in my three decades of critical appraisal of GM. The risks and hazards, while not exactly known or indeed precisely foreseeable, appear to be so grave that the proposed field-trials should be enjoined pending a thorough assessment such as has yet to be performed."

August 2006 The 13 member expert Committee is finalized in the 3rd week of August and by the 31st of August the composition of the committee is made public on the MoEF website. The expert committee is led by Dr Deepak Pental, Vice Chancellor , Delhi University . He is currently researching a Genetically Engineered mustard variety.

In September 2006, a plea by the petitioners of the case in the Supreme Court pointed out the fact that on the matter of field trials, the GEAC is seconding all decisions by the RCGM and was merely formalizing the oral approvals of the Review Committee of Genetic Manipulation (RCGM). In response to the plea, the Supreme Court, ordered the GEAC to withhold approvals of all field trials till further directions are issued.

On April 13th 2007, at the hearing in the Central Information Commission, the DBT admits to the Commission that no human and animal tests on safety have been conducted for the crops that are standing in test fields and that farmers have no information regarding the consequences, thereby increasing chances for potential accidents in the field.
It also refused to part with data of the toxicology and allergenicity studies of Bt brinjal to the despite the order of the commission to disclose the information.
The GEAC, which also has the data of brinjal has not disclosed entire data for public scrutiny.

In May 2007, the Supreme Court in an interim order allowed the field trials of 2006 (i.e) the trials that have been permitted by GEAC from 2nd May 2006 till 22nd September 2006, to continue this year under certain strict conditions:

- All trials should have a lead scientist's name with contact details who would be responsible for all aspects of the trials including regulatory requirements.
- An isolation distance of 200 m would be maintained during field trials.
- Prior to bringing out the GE material from the green house for conduct of open field trial, the Company should submit a validated event specific test protocol at an LOD of at least 0.01% to detect and confirm that there has been no contamination .

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The expert committee meets twice in the period and gives its final recommendations in its meeting on 3rd July. The Committee permits large scale trials of Bt Brinjal subject to the supreme court conditions while parallelly asking for additional tests to be done on toxicity/ allergenicity/ compositional/ nutritional studies; environmental safety, socio economic aspects. These tests would be done under the supervision of Dr. Mathura Rai, director, IVAR (Indian Institute of Vegetable Research, Varnasi) and in the research farms under the control of ICAR or IVAR.



September 2007: The petitioners of the Supreme Court case file a contempt of court petition at the Supreme Court, on the grounds that GEAC has approved crops that were not permitted by the Supreme Court order dated May 2007, including the large scale field trials of Bt Brinjal

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