

Kerala Report of the "Ban GM crops in India" dharna at New Delhi on 6th May 2008

**"Hundreds of farmers & consumers from 15 states call for a ban on GM crops:
Political leaders and celebrities join in"**

Hundreds of farmers and consumers from fifteen states of India, under the broad banner of 'Coalition for a GM-Free India' congregated at Jantar Mantar in the Capital on May 6th 2008, to demand for a complete ban on Genetically Modified [GM or GE] crops and foods in India. Hundreds of others joined them by signing on to "Ban GM" petitions and banners. The protestors were supported in their call by representatives of political parties covering the spectrum of UPA, NDA and UNPA. Well known celebrities like Milind Soman, Nafisa Ali, Nandita Das, Amala Akkineni, Sonal Mansingh, Rabbi Shergill etc., also declared that they would remain "GM-Free" and urged their followers to remain so too.



Farmers and Activists from Kerala joined in the protests. The following organizations were represented in the dharna from Kerala - Thanal (4), Trivandrum District Consumer Council (2), INFACCT from Pala(1), Desiya Karshaka Samithi from Palakkad (2), Nilambur Nature Study Centre(1), Kissan Jyothi Farmers Club from Vaduvanchal, Wyanad (2) and Grama Jyothi

Farmers Club from Noolpuzha, Wyanad (1). They had the support of hundreds of organizations and individuals who had signed on to the "Ban GE in India" banner, which was submitted to the Central Agriculture Minister Sri Sarad Pawar. Earlier on 8th April 2008, the signature campaign was inaugurated at Kochi on "Global People's NO GE Day" by the Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture in Kerala Sri Mullakara Rathnakaran.



The protestors declared that they refuse to become guinea pigs in the experimentation that the Indian government is subjecting all Indians to, in the name of GM crops & foods and announced that they would step up their campaign by creating a widespread informed debate on the issue.

The protest comes at a time when Indian regulators are considering the applications for (experimental) seed production for Mahyco's Bt Brinjal, the first such genetically modified vegetable anywhere in the world with the Bt (gene extracted from *Bacillus thurengiensis*) gene in it. Castigating the government for their false bogey of increased

need for food security in the country, the Coalition set the record straight by pointing out that experience with GM soybean, the largest cultivated GM crop in the world actually shows a decrease in yields with genetic modification. Further, genetic engineering as a technology cannot increase productivity since yield is a “multi-genic” function.



The Coalition also pointed out that the crisis of food security was caused because land was being taken away from agriculture use, food grains land is being cut down, food grain land is being shifted to bio-fuel production and livestock feed and the government’s policies are generally anti-farmer. They further pointed out that in the name of food security, unsafe food cannot be thrust down on Indians, especially when it is rejected in a majority of countries the world over.

The protest meet pointed out that if Bt Brinjal is allowed into India, the choice to choose between Bt Brinjal and other brinjal is completely lost for consumers of the country, since systems of segregation and labeling are impossible in India. The meeting reiterated that “this kind of tinkering with our food safety and our very health is completely undemocratic for any government”. At a time when organic and ecological farming is gaining demand and popularity both amongst farmers and consumers and at a time when India’s advantage on this front is becoming stronger, allowing even GM



field trials is unwise and reckless on the part of the government and shows a lack of vision for Indian farming. The Coalition promised to reach out to more farmers and consumers in the near future and step up their resistance against GM crops. At the end of the one-day protest, the protestors submitted their memorandum of demands to Mr Sharad Pawar, along with anti-GM banners with thousands of signatures.

Kerala's participation in the dharna was supported by INSAF, New Delhi and the Save our Rice Campaign-India. The Save our Rice Campaign also partly supported the farmers and consumer groups of Tamilnadu as well to participate in the dharna.

For further information (Kerala)

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