

The Death Of Rice In India

No Basmati, No Katarni

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We will soon be eating genetically modified rice invented by seeds multinational corporations

Someone said, "Monsanto invented the pig." Very soon we will learn, right here in India and Asia, that US and European seeds multinational corporations "invented" rice. And soon we shall be paying up front royalty to these companies for eating rice. Hold your breath; that situation is upon us.

I pose this question to you before you read further: What would you do to a company that claims it "invented rice" and wants its pound of flesh because you, Sirs and Madams, eat rice?

India is a rice country. Rice has been our staple for thousands of years. A French scientist had once said India has 200,000 varieties of rice. Other environmentalists say 100,000. Does it matter? In the traditional rice producing regions I found that the taste and shape of rice often differed from village to village. Not any more. Post green revolution, the varieties available in the market for commercial sowing has dropped to about fifty what must surely be called the greatest destruction of genetic diversity in any food crop anywhere in the world.

Forty years ago when my mother cooked basmati rice, a gentle aroma would pervade the entire home. Not any more. Under Green revolution rice slowly hybridized into a commodity and now produced in large mechanized farms with heavy doses of fertilizers and pesticides. Bayer CropScience, a German company, genetically modified rice seeds. This gene revolution genie is now out of the bottle and no one knows how many rice varieties are contaminated. No one really knows how much of this engineered poison has already entered our food chain. And that has happened without proper biosafety studies.

Rice belongs to the *Oryza* specie. Lay persons like me were told that rice is self pollinating with little or no chance of pollen drift and contamination of neighbour's rice field. However, RiceTech, a US-based hybrid seeds company, has documented that "wind assisted rice pollens can move over 600 feet." [APHIS Workshop, September 13-15, 2004; Abstract] If genetically engineered rice is planted amidst non-genetically modified rice, there is every chance that non-genetically modified rice will be contaminated and this is what happened in the United States of America.

US Rice Gets Contaminated

Bayer CropScience (the German multinational seeds company) conducted field trials of

LL601 (better known as Liberty Link 601) from 1999 to 2001 in Louisiana. It then dropped the project and did not seek US Government permission to market it. In 2006, widespread contamination of US long-grain rice with LL601 trait was reported.

Covering the event, Rick Weiss, the Washington Post staff writer, reported, "The U.S. Department of Agriculture is investigating how the variety escaped from test plots into farmers' fields, where it was quietly amplified for years until its discovery. The seeds and plants of LL601 look virtually identical to those of the popular conventional variety with which they had become mixed, said Steve Linscombe, director of Louisiana State University's rice research station in Crowley.. The day the contamination was announced in August, Bayer asked the government to approve the variety."

On 5th October 2007, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) concluded its genetically engineered rice investigation. Investigators had hoped to identify how each GE rice line entered the commercial rice supply, but the exact mechanism for introduction could not be determined in either instance. (Source: USDA, Press Release, www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid/2007/10/0284/xml) However, it could not pinpoint how engineered rice seeds could contaminate over such a large area. Speculation was rife: some said mislabeling, others said human error, yet others said containers got mixed up.

Approval By Contamination

On 24th November, 2006 the USDA granted marketing approval of genetically-engineered Liberty Link 601 of Bayer CropScience. (GE) rice variety following its illegal contamination of the food supply and rice exports, first announced three months ago. The controversial decision was taken despite the insistence of Bayer CropScience that it had dropped plans to commercialize the variety five years ago. "With this decision, USDA is telling agricultural biotechnology companies that it doesn't matter if you're negligent, if you break the rules, if you contaminate the food supply with untested genetically engineered crops, we'll bail you out," said Joseph Mendelson, Legal Director of the Center for Food Safety. "In effect, USDA is sanctioning an 'approval-by-contamination' policy that can only increase the likelihood of untested genetically engineered crops entering the food supply in the future, and further erode trust in the wholesomeness of U.S. food overseas," he added.

Naturally, Bayer CropScience welcomed the decision of USDA. "The deregulation confirms the preliminary decision of USDA, published on September 8, 2006, that LLRICE601 does not pose any environmental concerns and should no longer be regulated."

http://www.bayercropscience.com/bayer/cropscience/cscms.nsf/id/20061124_EN?Open&ccm=400020000&L=EN&markedcolor=%23003399

Oh yes, it does, Mr. Bayer. That is why US rice consignments were returned or destroyed at Rotterdam port.and another, and another.and another.

Is India Vulnerable?

You bet it is. In January I received a set of documents from an Agriculture University in West Bengal that illegal genetically modified Bhindi (Okra) has been planted. In March I was told in Jhansi that poor farmers were offered lucrative deals to plant "special seed" of all sorts of vegetables including green chilly.

Who knows at how many places illegal genetically engineered rice have been planted?

Only when contamination will be discovered at the port of landing of Indian rice exporters that India will wake up to the destruction of its 10,000 years of heritage: THE RICE.

Following on from the US example, it is not too far fetched to say that our favourite staple rice will be owned by one of the five or six seeds multinationals. because they "invented" it! Who will be the first to contaminate our rice is at best a guess.

But IT WILL BE CONTAMINATED. THEY ARE TOO DETERMINED TO OWN OUR FOOD.

Any questions?

Neither the Congress Party, nor BJP, nor CPM nor CPI, nor RSP, nor SP, nor Shiv Senanone has the guts or the political will to oppose the fraud of these multinational corporations. They have all been silenced.

"Who cares if GMO seeds don't provide any of the benefits that were promised? Certainly not the seed companies. Perhaps benefits to the people of the world were never the point. Perhaps the point was to get those first GMO crops in the ground — promise them the moon! — and then allow nature to take its course and contaminate the rest of the planet with patented pollen. The intellectual property lawsuits will come along in good time."

(Source: <http://www.grain.org/research/?id=354> 2005 was a very good year for the biotech food industry; Peter Montague; Rachel's Democracy & Health News #837, Jan-2006)

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