

# 20 years GENE CAMPAIGN



**THE CRISIS OF FOOD, FARMING AND FARMERS  
and what we can do about it**



**F**ood prices are going through the roof. Ironically, the farmer who feeds the nation is not able to feed his own family. Our food, the farmer and farming are in crisis.

Losses on the farm are leading to extreme rural poverty which is reflected in statistics. 87 per cent of the rural population does not get sufficient food. Malnutrition is acute and rampant. 50% of children are underweight, 98 % of adolescent girls and 96% of pregnant women are anaemic, according to government data.

Farmers are deserting their fields and running away to cities to try to earn what wages they can, doing menial jobs because farming does not pay. The government is the biggest buyer of farm produce and the price it offers does not even cover the cost of cultivation, let alone make a profit. This is true for all our major food crops like rice, wheat, jowar, bajra, maize, ragi, arhar, moong, urad, chana and barley.

How is the farmer to survive in such a situation ?

Farming and Farmers do not appear on the government's radar. Public investment in agriculture is declining every year, as it is, it's just about 1.2 % of the GDP. Agricultural research does not seem to have any connection with what the farmers really need; No technical help is provided to solve their problems in the field.

More than 2/3rds of Indian agriculture still has no irrigation facilities. Spurious products are sold openly, especially seeds and pesticides and the guilty are never punished because they are hand in glove with the powers that be.

There is no public investment to give the farmers a fair price or to strengthen their skills so they can become farm entrepreneurs. Instead, private players and contract farming has been encouraged making the farmer even more vulnerable.



Small farmers do not understand the complex legal language of contracts written in English and are often taken for a ride. Some years ago, farmers in Karnataka dumped their tomatoes on the highway. Why? Because they had cultivated the tomatoes under contract and the contractors backed out, leaving them stranded with mountains of tomatoes that could not be sold in the local markets. Even as the cost of farming is shooting up, less and less credit is available from the banks, insurance cover is not available either for crops or livestock. The ultimate tragedy is mounting debt and the unrelenting farmer suicides. 270,000 farmers killed themselves in the last 20 years, unable to bear the burden of debt and hounded by money lenders.

But this situation can change. We can be the agents of that change.

What Nelson Mandela said of poverty is true of hunger- *“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Sometimes it falls on a generation to be great. You can be that great generation.”*

Let us come together to launch a campaign for bountiful farming and prosperous farmers. Connect with us at [info@genecampaign.org](mailto:info@genecampaign.org)

## **20 years of Gene Campaign**

**G**ene Campaign, a research and advocacy organization was started in 1993 by Dr Suman Sahai and a group of experts who successfully fought the patent claims on the genetic wealth of the global South, made by industrial countries. Gene Campaign led the national campaign against seed patents and worked to ensure legal rights for farmers in Indian law. It worked with national and international partners against the Basmati patent and biopiracy efforts, especially on Turmeric.

The group works on the conservation of traditional seeds and indigenous knowledge and has set up several village level Gene-Seed Banks. Among its key activities are sustainable farming, household food and nutrition security; community based seed production; integrated farming for village development and policy advocacy on farming and food related issues.

Gene Campaign works together with the scientific community, students and youth, cultural activists, environmental groups, consumer groups, women's' groups, human rights and social justice groups. It has worked with farmers' organisations and rural and *adivasi* communities in its efforts to influence and change policy and laws on the ownership and use of bioresources. In addition to its national network, Gene Campaign has linkages with civil society groups working in developing and developed countries.

Gene Campaign's agenda is to work for the empowerment of farmers, especially women farmers; for research that addresses the problems of the farm family; for greater investment in agriculture and a fair share of natural resources; an extension service for technical support and trouble shooting; for fair and remunerative pricing that will enable the farm family to have better lives for themselves and their children; for farmers to have a voice in policy making and for better infrastructure in the villages to stem the flow of impoverished farmers forced to set aside their dignity and self-respect to eke out a living in the city.

Cover Photo: M R Hasan



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