



LANE- W-15C/2, SAINIK FARMS, KHANPUR,  
NEW DELHI – 110062 (INDIA)  
PH : +91 11 29552677; FX :- +91 11 29555961  
EMAIL – [mail@genecampaign.org](mailto:mail@genecampaign.org)  
WEB - <http://www.genecampaign.org>

## Press Release

Contact: Dr. Suman Sahai  
Mobile: - 9811041332

09 November, 2013

### Young India must play a role in solving our food and farming crisis- Suman Sahai

Gene Campaign, a well known research and advocacy organisation completes 20 years this year.

Distinguished award-winning scientist Suman Sahai, chairperson of the Gene Campaign, said that it is celebrating this milestone with a year long series of events on the theme of FOOD, FARMING AND FARMERS, starting on Nov 9, 2013.

An important part of Gene Campaign's program is to engage with urban youth to draw them into the discussion on how farming and farmers are in a crisis and how we need to join hands to change this. As Gene Campaign (GC) prepares to launch a campaign for bountiful farming, prosperous farmers and nutritious food, it looks to all sections to join, but very especially the young people.

Dr Suman Sahai said the young people must engage with the issues of food and nutrition since they must determine the country they want to inherit and lead. As tomorrow's leaders, they surely want a country that is food secure, inherently strong and self-reliant. They should remember that a country that is not food secure is not secure in any way. No country can be secured by guns alone.

What Nelson Mandela said of poverty, is true of hunger *“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity; it is an act of justice. 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. He exhorted the youth of his country ‘You can be that great generation.’”*

Dr Sahai said our youth have enormous strengths and most importantly- they have optimism. They can change the situation if they want to.

#### Program 9 Nov. 2013

To draw attention to the various aspects of Food, Farming and Farmers, Gene Campaign's first program is being organized at India International Center, 40 Max Muller Marg, New Delhi 110003 and consists of the following :

*Brainstorming session (10 am to 5 pm) - to develop a consensus charter of demands for interventions and policy changes required to make farming profitable and the farmer prosperous*

*Press Conference- 5.30 pm -to present the consensus Charter of Demands and discuss the changes recommended and the planned advocacy strategy*

*Film Clip - 7 pm- showing 'Decline of farming and farmers through the eyes of India cinema'*

*Talk by Dr Suman Sahai - 7.15 pm – 'Why Food, Farming and Farmers*

*Music concert 7.30 pm onwards- by the fusion band Advaita*

Traditional foods like red rice, linseed, ragi, buckwheat, apricot oil from Uttarakhand and Jharkhand will be available.

Following the program on 9 November, other events are planned through 2014. These include a short story competition, a photo competition, street plays and theatre and a demonstration of the traditional foods of India, especially rice.

Dr Suman Sahai, a distinguished genetic scientist who was awarded the Padma Shri in 2011 and the Borlaug award in 2004 for her contribution to agriculture and the environment, says that we have no option but to fight and defeat hunger and malnutrition. She echoes the statement made by Jawaharlal Nehru that everything else can wait but not agriculture. Nehru understood that if agriculture goes wrong in our country, nothing else can go right.

Let us be clear- only the farmer can defeat hunger, only he can produce the food that we need. If we strengthen his hands, invest properly in farming and not grab his share of land and water to give to other agencies, he will make the farms sing with the glowing bounty of diverse foods. Only the farmer can get us out of the quagmire that we have created by neglecting him.

## **20 years Gene Campaign**

*Gene 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.*

*GC 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' organizations 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.*

*GC'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 village to stem the flow of impoverished farmers forced to set aside their dignity and self-respect to eke out a living in the city.

Contact us at [mail@genecampaign.org](mailto:mail@genecampaign.org) and [www.genecampaign.org](http://www.genecampaign.org) ;

### **Some Gene Campaign milestones**

Gene Campaign has been working on farmers rights, sustainable food production and household nutrition, for the last 20 years.

Conserving the rice of India has been one of Gene Campaign's focus areas. The decade-long work by Gene Campaign to collect, characterize and conserve the traditional varieties of rice ,millets, pulses, maize and other food crops has been honoured with India's Genome Saviour award in 2009. Gene Campaign has established 12 village level Gene-Seed banks in Jharkhand with about 1000 varieties of traditional rice conserved in the Zero Energy banks. These varieties can be stored for upto 10 years. The seeds are available to farmers in a barter system so they don't have to find money to buy the seeds, but they must return three times what they took after harvest. This keeps the bank growing so that more farmers benefit every year.

The properties of each rice variety in the collection are measured scientifically and documented, to share with research institutes. Gene Campaign shared 324 traditional rice varieties with the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) in Delhi. This ongoing research has yielded 8 varieties which are highly resistant to a deadly rice disease, Bacterial Leaf Blight (BLB).

In this way, the Gene Campaign maintains Seed Banks, as well as Gene Banks in the field.

**GM Crops:** The Gene Campaign advocates proper regulation and stringent bio-safety testing for GM products. A writ petition filed in 2004 in the Supreme Court appealed for a national bio-technology policy and an upgrading of the regulatory system to make it more technically competent. It requested for a moratorium on GM crops till the regulatory structures were improved. Gene Campaign holds that GM technology in the country is being implemented in a careless and biased manner, thus endangering the environment and the health of animals and people.

**Indigenous Knowledge:** Gene Campaign has documented the Indigenous Knowledge (IK) of tribal communities relating to their use of biodiversity as food and medicine. The rich and diverse IK of the Oraons & Mundas in Jharkhand, the Bhils, Bhilalas and Patliyas, of Madhya Pradesh, the Tharus of the Terai region in Uttaranchal, and the Ahom, Mishing and Tiwa communities of Assam.

In order to protect the documentation against biopiracy, it is deposited with the Ministry of Science and Technology, Govt of India.

Gene campaign believes Indigenous Knowledge is a sophisticated technology which is the intellectual property of rural and tribal communities. It has been lobbying for a separate law to protect Indigenous Knowledge in the interest of local communities.

The group has successfully lobbied to keep traditional medicines and products derived from indigenous knowledge out of the purview of the Indian Patent Act.

**Household Nutrition:** Recognising that malnutrition is one of the biggest crises facing rural India, Gene Campaign pays special attention to improving the level of nutritious food available to the rural family. It has promoted the concept of Homestead Gardens as a source of extra nutrition and has established over 300 such gardens in the villages of Jharkhand and Uttarakhand. GC supplies seeds and planting material of fruits and vegetables in a 12 month plan that makes one or the other fruit or vegetable available to the family throughout the year. This is of great help in

bridging micronutrient deficiency in these families. These gardens are fed with kitchen waste water so they do not impose an extra burden on the farm women in these water deficit regions.

An important part of GC's approach to nutrition is the revival of wild and semi-domesticated foods rich in nutrition and available for free. Such foods include air potatoes, local tubers, leafy greens like green and red amaranth (chaulai), bathua, wild cress, leaves of buckwheat and even the young leaves of the stinging nettle plant.

Sustainable farming: Gene Campaign works with farmers in rain fed areas to make their agriculture more productive and sustainable and resilient to climate change. It engages with improving soil health and fertility and conservation of natural resources and has an ongoing program to provide training and skills to the farming community.

Policy advocacy: Gene Campaign has been largely responsible for raising a national debate about the dangers of seeds patents and its threat to food security. Its long and sustained struggle for farmer's rights culminated in legislation that grants legal rights to farmers known as "Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights". The campaign has been fighting the patent on basmati rice. Gene Campaign led the campaign for protection of India's bio-diversity and provided the first draft of bio-diversity legislation in 1997. It was passed in 2002.

**Dr. Suman Sahai**