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Press Release

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MAHYCO'S GM RICE CONTAMINATES NATURAL RICE IN JHARKHAND

Gene Campaign today confirmed the contamination of rice in Jharkhand , by genetically modified Bt rice belonging to the Mahyco company. Jharkhand, along with Orissa and Chattisgarh, is known to be the birthplace of rice, the region where the maximum genetic diversity of rice is found.

GM rice carrying the Bt gene was planted by the Mahyco company in field trials in Saporong village in Ratu block /Ranchi violating all rules prescribed by the government for such testing. The trial plots of GM rice were located unprotected, right in the middle of farmers' fields, without any physical containment by a boundary wall , netting or other means to keep the GM rice segregated from the surrounding natural rice fields. This is a serious violation which can lead to contamination of natural rice in the region with very negative consequences for rice genetic diversity and ultimately, food security

At harvest time, part of the GM rice under trial was harvested; part was left standing in the field. This is another clear violation of the law, which requires that after harvesting, all the crop residue of the trial GM crop should be burnt. This is an essential requirement, to ensure that there is no possibility of new GM plants coming up as wild 'volunteer' plants from left over clumps and becoming uncontrolled sources of Bt genes which could contaminate natural rice crops in the region.

In the Mahyco trial plots, all the clumps had been left in the field after harvesting and nothing was burnt. The company however lied to the government that everything had been burn after the harvest (see letter from Mahyco company). The surrounding rice plants that were harvested by the company were also not destroyed but thrown on the side of the fields (see photo) , providing another huge source of contamination of natural rice with the genetically engineered Bt rice.

Seeing the careless way in which the rice in the trial field and the surrounding rice, had been handled by the company, Gene Campaign staffers collected samples of seeds and leaves from the second generation rice plants that had come up as well as from the rice plants that had been thrown on the bunds .

Dr Suman Sahai, Convenor of Gene Campaign presented the reports which confirmed that the seeds and leaves that were sent for testing were indeed contaminated with the Cry1Ac gene , the gene that was used in the Bt rice being developed by Mahyco. These test results mean that the Bt gene has escaped from Mahyco's field trial plot and moved into the second generation of rice which has come up as wild plants at the trial site.

Dr Sahai said Mahyco has failed to keep the Bt gene under strictly controlled conditions, and isolated from the natural environment, as is required by the law. **The test results obtained by Gene Campaign provide conclusive proof that the Bt gene was allowed by Mahyco to escape into the environment.** This is of particularly great concern since the environment in this case is where the genetic diversity of rice is found and where damage to the rice gene pool could be maximal.

The fact that the Cry1Ac gene is detected outside the field trial site makes Mahyco- culpable and guilty of negligence, violation of the law, failure to contain the Bt gene and jeopardizing the genetic wealth of India by starting a process of contamination that could have devastating consequences for future food security.

Mahyco jeopardizes India's rice exports

Mahyco's negligence which has leaked the Bt gene into an important rice growing region, can result in GM contaminated rice which can also get mixed up with export consignments of rice. This will spell doom for rice exporters who will lose their markets in Europe, Middle East and Africa, if any GM rice is detected in their export consignments. All the regions mentioned are opposed to GM foods and do not allow it into their markets.

A few years ago in the US, rice from a single field trial conducted by the Ventria company, found its way into US rice exports many years after the trials were discontinued. This GM contaminated rice was detected in places as far apart as Germany and Japan. Countries rejected the contaminated US rice, so the US had to recall its export consignments, incurring losses of several million dollars. The contaminated consignments also led to the crash of America's rice export markets, causing long term losses to American rice growers

Gene Campaign demands, that for the violations committed by Mahyco, the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) should

-immediately revoke permissions granted to the company and take penal action against it under the Environment Protection Act,1986.

-Under provisions 13 and 15 of the *Rules for the Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms, Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells, 1989*, any agency found to violate the provisions for the testing of GMOs, can be penalized and can lose its license.

-The GEAC should take further action to seek damages from Mahyco, under provisions provided under the Environment Protection Act,1986

Dr. Suman Sahai