

(At Least)

10 REASONS FOR YOU TO SAY "NO" TO BT BRINJAL!

On October 14th 2009, the regulators¹ of the Government of India have cleared **Bt Brinjal**, the first Genetically Modified (GM) food crop in the country and the first ever vegetable in the world with a toxin-producing gene inside it, for commercial cultivation. The Government of India is to now decide on its commercial release after holding consultations with all stakeholders in January and February 2010.

Here are at least **10 reasons** why we should say NO to Bt Brinjal:--

1. GM crops are created by the unnatural **insertion of foreign genes into host DNA** of a plant, which leads to numerous unpredictable changes that are potentially dangerous for health. Bt Brinjal has been artificially created by insertion of a bacterial gene (*Bacillus thuringiensis*-Bt) to produce a toxin 24X7 inside the plant to target one pest—the Brinjal Fruit & Shoot Borer (it has to be noted that while many pests and diseases attack the crop, this technology is claimed as a solution to one such pest).
2. There are many unaddressed questions with regard to the **very need** of this Bt Brinjal. The National Agricultural Research System as well as **many practicing farmers have enormous knowledge on successful, sustainable and economically viable pest management without the use of synthetic pesticides**². In the face of such alternatives, it is not clear why the GM option (with the claim that it will bring down pesticide usage) is being pushed. Further, no one can argue that Bt Brinjal would be an answer to the hunger crisis!
3. **India is the Centre of Origin/Diversity of Brinjal** (more than 2500 varieties) and no GM version of any crop has been introduced in its Centre of Origin/Diversity *anywhere* in the world. This diversity—**national heritage**—is now under great threat from Bt Brinjal. Remember, brinjal is also a crop of great socio-cultural significance to Indians.
4. **Health implications of Bt Brinjal**—No independent research to prove the safety of Bt Brinjal exists. All decision-making happened based on the crop-developer's (i.e. Monsanto/Mahyco's) data. Further, *no long-term* (i.e., 90 days plus) or *human feeding studies exist*. This Bt Brinjal also contains anti-biotic resistant genes and poses serious public health concerns with the possibility of 'horizontal gene transfer'³. What's more, independent analyses of the crop developer's biosafety data concluded that **this Bt Brinjal is unsafe and unfit for human consumption**.

¹ Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) in the Ministry of Environment and Forests based on the recommendations of an "Expert Committee" on Bt Brinjal.

² For information on safer, cheaper and viable ways of brinjal pest management visit: <http://www.takingroots.in/>

³ Horizontal gene transfer (HGT), is a process in which an organism incorporates genetic material from another organism without being the offspring of that organism. By contrast, vertical transfer occurs when an organism receives genetic material from its ancestor, e.g. its parent or a species from which it evolved.

5. With **Bt Cotton (the only approved GM crop in India)**, there are several reports **of adverse animal and health impacts** (including animal deaths) that have not been systematically investigated. Further, from various studies, GM foods are known to cause allergies, immune system changes, damage to organs like kidneys and liver, affect growth and metabolism and impact reproductive health adversely.
6. Looking at another agricultural technology – synthetic pesticides – we need to remember that even here, many chronic and other health impacts were never assessed adequately. **The same players who gave the world such toxic pesticides are now pushing GM seeds** saying that pesticides are toxic for us – agreed, wholeheartedly – but **without closing down their agrichemical businesses!** UNLIKE CHEMICAL PESTICIDES, HOWEVER, **GM SEEDS CAN NEVER BE RECALLED**, SINCE SEEDS HAVE A LIFE OF THEIR OWN AND PROPAGATE THEMSELVES IN UNCONTROLLABLE WAYS....
7. If Bt Brinjal is approved, we, as consumers, will have no way of knowing whether the brinjal we consume daily is GM or not, as all brinjals in the market will look the same. **This will be a violation of every consumer's right to know, right to safe food and right to choose which food she/he wants to eat.** Further, labeling cannot be a solution for India where the majority of consumption is of unpackaged foods in the open market and from local *mandis*.
8. Bt Brinjal has not been assessed for its impact on **Indian Systems of Medicine** (ISM). Brinjal and related species are used widely in **Ayurveda** and other medicinal systems. One can hence not predict whether the entry of Bt Brinjal would make ISM medicines/practices ineffective or even toxic!
9. If Bt Brinjal is approved, this will open the way for **rapid approvals** of other GM food crops. There are at least 55 plants being developed in India through genetic modification including rice, cabbage, bhindi, cauliflower, tomato etc. An approval to Bt Brinjal will open up the floodgates of other approvals and the **GM industry is very keen on bringing in this Bt Brinjal as the Trojan Horse.**
10. The **constitution and functioning of the Expert Committee** set up to study Bt Brinjal, as also the haste with which the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee has cleared the crop is itself questionable on fundamental scientific and democratic grounds. Several State governments have written to the Centre to express their concern and some have declared a ban on Bt Brinjal in their states, given that Agriculture and Health are state subjects as per the Constitution of India. For their constitutional right over their agriculture to be upheld, no Bt Brinjal should be allowed anywhere in the country.

Now is the time when the Government of India needs to show whether it believes in (and supports) sustainable development or not. A precautionary approach is the only way forward to uphold the best interests of Indian farmers and consumers in this matter - the Government should not allow this unnecessary Bt Brinjal, particularly because safer, viable and more sustainable alternatives exist.

Please submit your concerns with regard to Bt Brinjal to Mr. Jairam Ramesh, Minister of State (Independent charge) for Environment & Forests preferably by post and/or fax:

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You may also submit your comments/observations to Hon'ble Minister for Environment & Forests, via MoEF website:

<http://moef.nic.in/modules/contact-ministry/contact-ministry/>

You can get more information on www.indiagminfo.org clicking the top left-hand link called "Bt Brinjal related material", including all the independent analyses of crop developer's biosafety data.

You can get in touch with us at:

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