

Letter of Kerala Chief Minister to PM outlawing GM seeds in Kerala

To
Shri. Manmohan Singh
Honourable Prime Minister of India
South Block
New Delhi

Greetings from the 'God's own country'.

I am addressing an important issue here - the introduction of GM crops and food in the State as well as in the country. I understand our stand on the GM crops and foods was already made very clear to the Union Agriculture Minister, Shri. Sarat Pawar, and to your kind self, by our Agriculture Minister, Shri . Mullakara Ratnakaran and the Chairman of the Kerala State Biodiversity Board, Dr. V. S. Vijayan respectively.

We are concerned about the introduction of the GM crops into the State. We had conducted a national workshop on the desirability of the GM crops sometime in April 2008 and, at the end of the two day workshop, it had come out with a unanimous resolution that the GM crops and foods should not be allowed in the State and, the resolution further says that we should also try to impress upon the Union Government in banning the GM in the country. A copy of the resolution is enclosed herewith for your ready reference.

May I reiterate that the Kerala State has already taken a policy decision not to allow GM crops, even for trials, until the debate on the issue of GM that is going on the world over is settled for ever. We are convinced with the available information that:

- (a) GM crops are not economically viable for the farmers,
- (b) GM crops and foods lead to unimaginable health hazards,
- (c) GM crops contaminate the local and wild varieties, the damages of which are irrevocable and, such contamination of our traditional varieties cause irreparable damage to food security of the country
- (d) GM denies the farmers right to choose what he wants to sow in his own farm, and ultimately,
- (e) the country's sovereignty over food and agriculture will be endangered.

Moreover, we are convinced that the Genetic Modification of crops is not a solution for hunger as has been wrongly advocated by the proponents of the GM, because the genetic modification is done not to increase the productivity, but to control the insect pests or the weeds. I am sure, you would agree with me that there are several cheaper and environment-friendly options to control the pests and weeds.

It may also be noted the Task Force on Application of Biotechnology on Agriculture headed by Prof. M. S. Swaminathan is unambiguous that the mega-diversity centres and biodiversity hotspots like Western Ghats shall be kept free of any GM experiments/ crops.

The Task Force report further recommends that even the transgenic research should not be undertaken in crops/commodities where our international trade will be affected.

In this context, you may please note that Kerala is a State heavily depended on international market for its agricultural commodities. Any contamination from genetic modification can cause further damage in the trade prospects of the State..

Kerala is also an important centre of diversity of medicinal plants and heritage of traditional medicines like ayurveda. Serious concern has already been expressed by the Ayurveda practitioners on GM research being undertaken on various crops.

You would be delighted to note that the State has already declared an Organic Farming Policy, Strategy and Action Plan in 2008. Accordingly, the entire food crops would be converted to organic within five years and the cash crops within another five years. This will, apart from helping to feed the people with non-poisoned food, enhance our export possibilities with a high premium. However, introduction of GM crops will certainly defeat the very purpose of organic farming, because GM crops/foods are more disastrous than those from crops raised using chemical pesticides and fertilisers. It would also kill the State's trade prospects.

Considering all these, the Government of Kerala has taken a decision to prohibit all environmental release of GMOs and keep the State totally GM free. We would also request the Honourable Prime Minister to reconsider the policy on GM in the national scale and declare a moratorium at least for the next 50 years, so that we could learn the desirability of GM from other countries where it is being practised in large scale.

We would urge the Central Government to respect the well informed decision of the State Government and issue necessary orders to all concerned Ministries not to permit any GM research or release of GMOs within the boundaries of the State. Such an order from the Union Government will further strengthen the federal fabric of our nation as enshrined in the constitution.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely

V. S. Achuthanandhan

Copy to: Ministry of: Environment and Forests; Agriculture and Cooperation; Science and Technology; Health and Family Welfare; and Department of Biotechnology