



MAHYCO CONDUCTS GM RICE FIELD TRIALS IN BIRTHPLACE OF RICE

# Contaminating Natural Rice

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*No containment of the crop was done by Mahyco as mandated by law to prevent mixing of seeds/grains from GM crop fields), no fencing or netting of any kind was provided. Post harvest crop stumps were left standing in the Trial Field.*

**M**ahyco, a partner of Monsanto Corporation in India, has been conducting field trials in Jharkhand, flouting every prescribed regulation and condition laid down for field trials of GM crops. Gene Campaign staff made visits to the site of the Bt rice trial and spoke to the farmers in Saporong village to get details of how the trial was conducted. The details are as follows:

Bt Rice hybrids belonging Mahyco seed company were planted on approx 1 acre. Planting was done on March 29, 2008, the crop was harvested on August 11, 2008. This is not the main rice season in Jharkhand. The main paddy season is June to December. There are almost no rice pests at this time, so it is not possible to test the efficacy of the Bt induced resistance to pests.

Farmers had no idea what was planted in the trial field, they had never heard of Bt Rice or GM Rice. The company had told them nothing. The State Agriculture Department had no information about the proposed Bt rice trials. Farmers in Saporong told Gene Campaign staffers that Mahyco staff came to observe the trials and sprayed the crop (farmers did not know with what )

There was no physical containment or any kind of isolation of the trial field. No containment of the crop was done (mandated by law to prevent mixing of seeds/grains from GM crop fields), no fencing or netting of any kind was provided. The trial field is located in the midst of an agricultural area and is surrounded by farmers' fields on all sides. The boundaries of neighbouring fields are close together and it is impossible to prevent contamination of rice in other fields.

People walked regularly through the trial fields to other fields, increasing the possibility of contamination. Since the trials were done on high lying fields, the water flowed from there to lower fields, carrying soil, seeds, etc to fields below. Just one local farmer was appointed as caretaker to supervise the trials. Nobody from the company came to supervise the harvest and disposal of the crop residue.

Scientists of the Birsa Agricultural University in Ranchi refused to monitor the rice trials since they were not involved from the beginning but were asked to monitor the fields at a late stage. Senior scientists said that they were not informed about how the trials were conducted, adding that there was no way of knowing whether Mahyco was spraying its trial fields to show that pests were controlled in the Bt rice.

Post harvest crop stumps have been left standing in the trial field. These have thrown up tillers and seed has already set in the tillers. These rogue Bt rice seeds will start the process of contaminating other rice crops in the region as they multiply in each crop cycle. After the news of Mahyco's violations appeared in the media, the company rushed its officials to the field trial site in Jharkhand the next day and destroyed the evidence. Gene Campaign has photographs of the destroyed trial field. Mahyco has clearly conducted the field trials of Bt rice hybrids by violating every rule in the book.

Gene Campaign has spent the last several years, collecting and conserving the traditional rice varieties of these regions in village level Seed Banks, in order to save the genetic wealth and diversity of rice and return it to farmers' fields. The Gene Campaign Banks now have about 1,900 samples of traditional rice and roughly 600 samples of other traditional crop varieties. Reckless conduct by companies like Mahyco could end up contaminating such rice germplasm.

The planting of genetically engineered rice in Jharkhand is of special concern since Jharkhand along with Orissa and Chhattisgarh is considered the Centre of Origin, that is, the birthplace of rice and the maximum genetic diversity of rice is found here. Any genetic contamination from foreign genes like the Bt gene can very detrimental effects on the genetic diversity of rice.

## India is Centre of Origin and diversity

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety urges countries that are Centres of Origin to exercise the utmost caution. Following this, other countries have decided to exercise the Precautionary Principle and have banned GM versions of the crop for which they are centres of origin. Mexico, the birthplace of corn does not allow planting of GM corn, Peru, the origin of potato has a ban on GM potato and China from where soybean originated, does not allow GM soybean. It is shocking that India, the birthplace of rice, does not exercise any caution with respect to rice

