

New from GRAIN
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Seedling April 2008

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IN THIS ISSUE...

Even if we weren't there, most of us remember COP 8, which was held in Curitiba in Brazil in March 2006. Demonstrations by farmers, peasants, indigenous peoples and civil society compelled government representatives from all over the world to uphold the ban on GURTs (Genetic Use Restriction Technologies). GURTs are experimental forms of genetic engineering technology, sometimes referred to as "terminator" technologies, that provide the means to restrict the development of a trait in a plant variety by turning a genetic switch on or off. It seemed that the "Ban Terminator" campaign had succeeded in putting suicide seeds and other such technologies into a deep freeze. It was a moment of triumph which reaffirmed the power of social movements and popular organisations to influence the course of history.

But, as is demonstrated in the opening article in this issue, first published in our sister Latin American publication, Biodiversidad, the push for GURTs continues, even within governments that supported the ban. Just a few months after the Curitiba meeting, the European Union began the Transcontainer Project to develop genetically modified crops that are "biologically contained". It is the same terminator technology but dressed up with a new coating of greenwash. The Transcontainer website describes what they are doing as an environmentally friendly way of "significantly reducing the spread of transgenes of GM crop plants to conventional and organic crop plants and to wild and weedy relatives". COP 9 is to be held in Bonn, Germany in May. As it approaches, it is time to challenge this technology yet again.

Terminator technology is only one of a range of "second generation" genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In this issue we are publishing an important article by Guy Kastler from the Réseau Semences Paysannes (Peasant Seed Network) in France. He explains in careful and concise language the new strategy that the European biotechnology companies have assembled, with the support of the authorities. On the face of it, European consumers appear to be winning the battle against GMOs. The European authorities are no longer pressing for the acceptance of US-led "first generation" GMOs. Indeed, Monsanto's tactics in chasing farmers for the payment of royalties have been criticised as far too aggressive. But, as Kastler demonstrates, Europe's reappraisal only amounts to a tactical retreat. Behind the scenes, European companies are quietly developing a second generation of GMOs that will be far harder to combat.

These new GMOs will be equipped with GURTs, or they will be developed by new high-tech breeding techniques that will permit the companies even greater control over seeds through legal mechanisms such as plant breeders' rights. Since many of these new genetically manipulated products will fall outside the strict definition of a GMO, they will be exempt

from the mandatory assessment and specific authorisation that are required for GMOs. Many consumers opposed to GMOs will unwittingly end up purchasing them.

In our special issue on agrofuels in last July's Seedling, we paid insufficient attention to India, which is emerging as a leading producer of biodiesel, mainly manufactured from jatropha, a bushy tree. As it grows well on dry, infertile soil, jatropha is often cited as an ideal crop for agrofuels, as it can be grown on waste land. However, what appears as "waste land" to outsiders can often play a crucial role in the life of rural communities who have to make full use of scant resources to survive. Jatropha has long been a useful plant for many of these communities, but today it is being used as a tool in the corporate take-over of rural India.

Our interviewee in this issue is Daycha Siripatra, a leading grassroots activist in Thailand. He talks about the farmers' profound knowledge of seeds and plants, which means that, even without carrying out scientific tests, they realise when their crops have been contaminated by GMOs. There are more than 6,000 varieties of rice in Thailand, he says, and these varieties need to be grown in the fields where, in the skilled hands of local farmers, they can adapt to changing climatic conditions. It is the experience of people like Daycha Siripatra that led GRAIN recently to argue that it is far more important to have seeds growing and being adapted in the fields, rather than to conserve them in vaults. They must remain a living resource.

The editor

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SEEDS OF PASSION by Verónica Villa

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=541>

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=541&pdf>

(PDF 1.7 MB) A couple of years ago it seemed as if mass-based movements throughout the world had won the battle to ban Terminator seeds. But the biotechnology companies are back on the offensive, arguing that the urgent need to combat global warming makes it imperative to use Terminator technology. Many peasant farmers around the world believe this to be yet another spurious argument used by the companies to gain acceptance for their unnecessary and dangerous technology. In the run-up to COP 9 in May 2008, we reproduce an edited version of an article first published in our sister Spanish-language magazine, Biodiversidad

NEW THREAT FROM COVERT GMOS by Guy Kastler

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=542>

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=542&pdf>

(PDF 714 kb) The battles lines in the power struggle over seeds are shifting in Europe. Authorities are dropping plans to push US-led "first generation" genetically modified organisms (GMOs), so that European companies can develop "covert" GMOs and new "double-locked" seeds instead. In 2008, the Sarkozy regime will use the French presidency of

the European Union to promote its own corporate-led agenda on these issues. It is becoming more important than ever that farmers assert their collective rights over seeds. Guy Kastler of the Peasant Seed Network in France explains.

AGROFUELS IN INDIA, PRIVATE UNLIMITED by GRAIN

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=543>

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=543&pdf>

(PDF 1.9 MB) Responding enthusiastically to the world agrofuel frenzy, the Indian government has promised a flurry of initiatives to encourage the large-scale planting of agrofuel crops, particularly jatropha. Without waiting for the government support to be spelt out, corporations are already moving in, taking over resources that have traditionally been used by rural communities. As a result, local people will find it harder to satisfy their food and fuel needs. Once again, it is the rural poor who will bear the cost of the agrofuel boom, while reaping few of the benefits.

FTA, BY ANY NAME, CAN BE WORSE THAN A TSUNAMI, a "Sprouting up" by GRAIN

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=544>

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=544&pdf>

(PDF 109 kb) Tourism and free trade fishing have their impact in post-tsunami south east Asia

SEEDS OF INFORMATION by GRAIN

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=545>

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=545&pdf>

(PDF 398 kb) Roundup Ready diplomat; Land conflict in Egypt; Increased pesticide use in GM crops; Chickens growing faster; and Indonesians take action over soya prices.

INTERVIEW WITH DAYCHA SIRIPATRA by GRAIN

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=546>

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=546&pdf>

(PDF 260 kb) Daycha Siripatra is an agriculturist, farmer, rice breeder and one of the leading grassroots activists in Thailand. He is also the founder of the Khao Kwan Foundation (KKF), an organisation involved in promoting sustainable agriculture and ecological alternatives. KKF is one of the founding organisations of the Alternative Agriculture Network in Thailand.

RESOURCES by GRAIN

<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=547>

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(PDF 103 kb) The Future Control of Food: a guide to international negotiations and rules on intellectual property, biodiversity, and food security edited by Geoff Tansey and Tasmin Rajotte; La bataille des OGM: Combat vital ou d'arrière-garde? by Birgit Müller; Stuffed and Starved: Markets, Choices and the Battle for the World's Food System by Raj Patel

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(PDF 109 kb) We take a look at GRAIN's latest publications...