

NO MORE TRANSGENIC TRIALS: Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth

Press Release, April 2 2009

Pune: Dr Rajaram Deshmukh, Vice Chancellor of Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth (MPKV, a State Agriculture University) promised an Inquiry Committee set up to look into a GM (Genetically Modified) corn trial of Monsanto in Kolhapur, that the University takes cognizance of the various concerns and queries being raised and would not undertake any more transgenic trials.

He assured the Inquiry Committee that the open air trial will be stopped soon and all material from the trial plot would be destroyed completely. The Inquiry Committee was set up after a protest rally and sit-in on Shaheed Diwas (March 23rd) by hundreds of farmers and consumers under the leadership of veteran farmers' leaders like N D Patil and Vijay Jawandhia, at the MPKV's Kolhapur "B Farm", against American MNC Monsanto's GM Corn trial being conducted there.

The Inquiry Committee pointed out that a majority of countries around the world do not allow GM crops/foods based due to sound scientific reasoning and agriculture scientists in India need to develop a healthy sense of questioning and skepticism about this technology rather than accept research trial orders from authorities in Delhi or some such place. The Committee also shared with the University authorities information on contamination from the Bt Rice trial plot in Jharkhand recently.

"It is misleading to call this a confined trial when it is an open air trial of an untested new product posing a grave threat of contamination. There has already been a recent report confirming contamination from a similar GM crop open air trial in the form of a Bt Rice trial in Jharkhand despite Indian Supreme Court's orders to the contrary. It is also clear there is no functional State Biotechnology Coordination Committee (SBCC) or a District Level Committee (DLC) as laid down by the Environment Protection Act" stated the Inquiry Committee members.

Earlier in the day, the Inquiry Committee held a meeting at the College of Horticulture (College of Agriculture campus), Pune with the Vice Chancellor and other senior officials of the MPKV including the Director of Research, Dr Mehetre. The members went into questions like: Is this GM corn required in India and whether a need assessment has been taken up in addition to an impact assessment especially on employment for poor rural women with the advent of such technologies; on the health and environmental implications of GM corn as well as herbicide use; on research partnerships by public sector bodies like MPKV running with tax-payers' funds, with corporations like Monsanto which are known for their anti-farmer and illegal activities elsewhere; on the increasing unsustainability and non-viability of Indian farming due to increased use of irrigation, chemical fertilizers and other agri-chemicals with technologies like GM; on the decision-making processes adopted before undertaking the trial; on whether EPA rules have been followed including having a functional SBCC/DLC to oversee the trial etc.

The Vice Chancellor told the Committee that he personally feels that herbicide tolerance technology might be suitable for large commercial farms in developed countries but not for small farmers in India. MPKV has become the first University in the state to announce that it will focus on other breeding technologies like Marker Assisted Selection rather than transgenics and to take a decision that they will not do any more transgenic trials.

For more information, contact:

N D Patil, Ex-Minister, Govt of Maharashtra & noted farmers' leader: 98-220-55410
Diliprao Deshmukh, Vice-Chair, Maharashtra Organic Farming Federation: 98-814-97092
Satish Bhansode, Programme Coordinator, CYDA: 98-609-12169
Rajesh Krishnan, Greenpeace India: 098-456-50032
Kavitha Kuruganti, Kheti Virasat Mission: 093-930-01550