

## The Illegal Entry of GMOs into India

Mortgaging the Public Interest. Gross Maladministration

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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*Despite five high-level reports (listed [here](#)) in India advising against the adoption of genetically modified (GM) crops, the drive to get GM mustard commercialised (which would be India's first officially-approved GM food crop) has been relentless. Although the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) has given it the nod, GM mustard remains held up in the Supreme Court mainly due to a public interest litigation by environmentalist Aruna Rodrigues.*

Rodrigues argues that GM mustard is being undemocratically forced through with [flawed tests \(or no testing\) and a lack of public scrutiny](#) and that [unremitting scientific fraud and outright regulatory delinquency](#) has taken place. She is seeking a moratorium on the environmental release of any genetically modified organism (GMO) in the absence of: comprehensive, transparent and rigorous biosafety protocols; biosafety studies conducted by independent expert bodies; and access to biosafety protocols and data in the public domain.

On Friday 24 August 2018 and in relation to the ongoing court proceedings surrounding GM mustard, Rodrigues filed an additional court application concerning the ongoing illegal imports of GM seed, GM soy cultivation in Gujarat and the presence of GMO imports in processed foods and oils. All of this represents a back-door entry of GMOs into India.

The application is scathing about what it calls proof of ultimate 'regulatory delinquency' and of the regulators and attendant government ministries mortgaging the public interest.

[This new 78-page submission to court](#) asserts that the GEAC has provided cover for the illegal trade in imports of GM processed foods, including huge quantities of GM seeds as well as processed and crude soy oil. The GEAC is also accused of deliberately allowing the contamination of India's food chain with untested GMOs, thereby potentially endangering the health of Indians.

In addition to the illegal cultivation of herbicide-tolerant (HT) soybean in Gujarat, there have also been reports of [HT cotton illegally growing in India](#) (insecticide-containing Bt cotton is the only legally sanctioned GM crop in India).

Interestingly, [this 2017 paper](#) discusses how cotton farmers have been encouraged to change their crop planting practices, leading to more weeds appearing in their fields. The outcome of this change in terms of yields or farmer profit is no better than before. These

changes, however, coincide with illegal HT cotton seeds appearing on the market: farmers are being pushed towards a treadmill reliance on illegal cotton seeds genetically engineered designed to withstand chemical herbicides.

The authors, **Glenn Stone** and **Andrew Flachs**, say that traditional planting practices and ox-plough weeding are:

“... being actively undermined by parties intent on expanding herbicide markets and opening a niche for next-generation genetically modified cotton.”

They observe:

“The challenge for agrocaptial is how to break the dependence on double-lining and ox-weeding to open the door to herbicide-based management.... how could farmers be pushed onto an herbicide-intensive path?”

In 2018, the Centre for Science and Environment tested 65 imported and domestically produced processed food samples in India. Some 32 per cent of the samples tested were GM positive: 46 per cent of those imported and 17 per cent of those samples manufactured in India. Out of the 20 GM-positive packaged samples, 13 did not mention use of GM ingredients on their labels. Some brands had claims on their labels suggesting that they had no GM ingredients but were found to be GM positive.

The situation has prompted calls for probes into the workings of the GEAC and other official bodies who seem to be asleep at the wheel or deliberately looking the other way.

But this wouldn't be the first time: India's only (now legal) GM crop cultivation – Bt cotton – was discovered in 2001 growing on thousands of hectares in Gujarat. The GEAC was caught off-guard when news about large scale illegal cultivation of Bt cotton emerged, even as field trials that were to decide whether India would opt for this GM crop were still underway.

In March 2002, the GEAC ended up approving Bt cotton for commercial cultivation in India. To this day, no liability has been fixed for the illegal spread.

The tactic of contaminate first then legalise has benefited industry players elsewhere too. In 2006, for instance, the US Department of Agriculture granted marketing approval of GM Liberty Link 601 (Bayer CropScience) rice variety following its [illegal contamination](#) of the food supply and rice exports. The USDA effectively sanctioned an 'approval-by-contamination' policy.

In her evidence submitted to court, Aruna Rodrigues argues that what is happening must invite the gravest charges. At least four institutions stand accused of unconscionable gross maladministration: The GEAC, Ministry of Commerce, the Food Safety Standards Authority, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade the Directorate of Plant Protection and Quarantine & Storage.

### **Corruption at the core of the global GM project**

Corruption and illegality go hand in hand with the global GM project. For instance, a jury in San Francisco recently found that Monsanto had failed to warn former groundsman

Dewayne Johnson and other consumers of the cancer risks posed by its weed killers. It awarded him \$39 million in compensatory and \$250 million in punitive damages.

The jury's verdict found not only that Monsanto's Roundup and related glyphosate-based brands presented a substantial danger to people using them but that there was "clear and convincing evidence" that Monsanto's officials acted with "malice or oppression" in failing to adequately warn of the risks.

The warning signs seen in scientific research about the dangers of glyphosate dated back to the early 1980s and have only increased over the decades. However, Monsanto worked not to warn users or redesign its products but to create its own science, designed to appear independent and thus more credible, to show they were safe.

To have Roundup removed from the market or its use heavily restricted would pull the rug from under much of Monsanto's GM endeavour to date, which has relied on the roll-out of two crop traits: herbicide tolerance and bt insecticide. Monsanto genetically engineered crops to withstand direct spraying of Roundup (HT trait): these seeds and the herbicide are huge money spinners for the company. It comes as little surprise to many therefore that the company would use all means necessary to protect its product and its bottom line.

Glyphosate-based herbicides are widely used around the globe. Residues are commonly found in food and water supplies, and in soil, air samples and rainfall. Regulators, however, have failed to heed the warnings of independent scientists, even brushing aside the findings of the World Health Organization's top cancer scientists who classified glyphosate as a "probable human carcinogen".

Another trial will take place in October in St Louis involving roughly 4,000 plaintiffs whose claims are pending with the potential outcomes resulting in many more hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars in damage awards. They all allege that their cancers were caused by exposure to Monsanto's herbicides and that Monsanto has long known about, and covered up, the dangers (it is no coincidence that [in Argentina](#), where glyphosate is liberally sprayed on GM HT crops, there has been dramatic increases in birth defects and cancers).

Unsurprisingly, many in India have called for a ban on HT tolerant crops. The Supreme Court appointed TEC Committee recommended a ban on HT crops (2013) and the Swaminathan Task Force Report (2004) recommendation was that HT crops are completely unsuited to Indian agriculture. Health dangers aside, in a country of small farms where multi-cropping is common, sanctioning the liberal spraying of herbicides on GM HT crops would be grossly negligent. Even in the US, with its huge farms and mono crop expanses, the spraying of the herbicide dicamba is causing [big problems](#) for farmers, many of whom claim the chemical has drifted onto their fields, damaging crops that are not genetically modified to withstand it.

But India's regulators and attendant ministries have tried to introduce GM mustard which is tolerant to another herbicide, glufosinate (contained in Bayer's brand 'Basta'), a neurotoxin even more toxic than glyphosate.

**Prof. Dave Schubert** (Salk Institute for Biological Studies) in his document '[A Hidden Epidemic](#)', says that we have reached the point where the evidence against probable carcinogen, glyphosate (active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup), is "directly analogous with DDT, asbestos, lead and tobacco, where industries were able to block regulatory

actions for many years by perpetually muddying the waters about their safety with false or misleading data.”

Where GM is concerned, we are witnessing an unnecessary gamble with the genetic core of food, the environment and human health. Unnecessary because the US authorities themselves have conceded that GM crops have failed to achieve desired benefits. For example, regarding drought tolerance, the USDA [has admitted](#) that Monsanto’s drought-tolerant corn performs no better than existing drought-tolerant varieties of non-GM corn.

Regarding yields, in 2016 the US National Academies of Sciences concluded,

“The nation-wide data on maize, cotton, or soybean in the United States do not show a significant signature of genetic engineering technology on the rate of yield increase.”

In [India](#) and [Burkina Faso](#), Bt cotton has not been a success. Moreover, a largely non-GMO Europe [tends to outperform](#) the US, which largely relies on GM crops. In general, “GM crops have not consistently increased yields or farmer incomes, or reduced pesticide use in North America or in the Global South (Benbrook, 2012; Gurian-Sherman, 2009)” (from the report ‘Persistent narratives, persistent failure’).

“Currently available GM crops would not lead to major yield gains in Europe,” [says Matin Qaim](#), a researcher at Georg-August-University of Göttingen, Germany.

Consider too that once the genetic genie is out of the bottle, there may be no way of going back. For instance, Roger Levett, specialist in sustainable development, argues (‘Choice: Less can be more, in Food Ethics, Vol. 3, No. 3, Autumn 2008):

“If some people are allowed to choose to grow, sell and consume GMO foods, soon nobody will be able to choose food, or a biosphere, free of GMOs. It’s a one-way choice... once it’s made, it can’t be reversed.”

HT crops have also led to [serious problems \(as set out here\)](#) in countries where they are used.

Moreover, non-GM alternatives [can outperform GM](#), yet officialdom in India seems to be facilitating the contamination of agriculture with illegal GMOs.

And what of India’s only legally permitted GM crop to date? The peer reviewed study [“Deconstructing Indian cotton: weather, yields and suicides”](#) concludes that “annual farmers’ suicide rates in rainfed areas are inversely related to farm size and yield and directly related to increases in Bt-cotton adoption (i.e. costs)”.

Despite evidence of [the failure of Bt cotton](#), Aruna Rodrigues notes that for the regulators it nevertheless strangely remains the official template of ‘success’ for other GM crops.

## **GMO based on a fraud**

GM has not delivered as promised, is not 'substantially equivalent' to non-GM counterparts and poses unique risks (previously discussed [here](#)).

And the corporations behind the roll-out of GM have done little to inspire confidence. According to [Steven Druker](#), we can see that GMOs were approved fraudulently in the face of scientific warnings: clear, early warnings right from the start of possible harm. As the latest application to India's Supreme Court states:

"These early warnings have been confirmed and reinforced up to the present time, through independent studies; this despite great difficulties faced by scientists, which include 'persecution', and sackings, nothing short."

There are major uncertainties concerning the technology (not least regarding its [precision](#) and health safety aspects), which are brushed aside by industry lobbyists with claims of 'the science' is decided and the 'facts' about GM are indisputable. Such claims are merely [political posturing](#) and part of the plan to tip the policy agenda in favour of GM. Tipping that agenda also involves corruption and the subversion of democratic institutions.

Following the court decision to award in favour of **Dewayne Johnson**, attorney **Bobby Kennedy Jr** said the following at the post-trial press conference:

"... you not only see many people injured, but you also see a subversion of democracy. You see the corruption of public officials, the capture of agencies that are supposed to protect us all from pollution. The agencies become captured by the industries they are supposed to regulate. The corruption of science, the falsification of science, and we saw all those things happen here. This is a company (Monsanto) that used all of the plays in the playbook developed over 60 years by the tobacco industry to escape the consequences of killing one of every five of its customers... Monsanto... has used those strategies..."

He then went on to say glyphosate is ubiquitous in the food supply and is related to so many terrible life-threatening conditions, which he listed.

Given the failure or lukewarm performance of GM technology, the risks to health and the environment and the devastation caused by India's only legal GM crop to date, many might be wondering why Indian authorities are facilitating the entry of (chemical-dependent) GMOs into the food system.

Why is there so much support for a technology mired in fraud that has to date created more problems and risks than benefits?

Why - despite increasing support for highly productive, sustainable zero-budget farming in places like [Andhra Pradesh](#) and [Karnataka](#) - is a bogus technology being pushed?

Why, based on India's [unnecessary](#) and [rising](#) import bill, is unadulterated (non-GM) food, self-reliance and food security an anathema to policy makers?

In other words, whose interests are ultimately being served: the public, the farmers or those of transnational agrocaptial?

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**Colin Todhunter** is a frequent contributor to *Asia-Pacific Research*.

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## **Seeds of Destruction: Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation**

**Author Name: F. William Engdahl**

**ISBN Number: 978-0-937147-2-2**

**Year: 2007**

**Pages: 341 pages with complete index**

List Price: \$25.95

**Special Price: \$18.00**

This skilfully researched book focuses on how a small socio-political American elite seeks to establish control over the very basis of human survival: the provision of our daily bread. "Control the food and you control the people."

This is no ordinary book about the perils of GMO. Engdahl takes the reader inside the corridors of power, into the backrooms of the science labs, behind closed doors in the corporate boardrooms.

The author cogently reveals a diabolical world of profit-driven political intrigue, government corruption and coercion, where genetic manipulation and the patenting of life forms are used to gain worldwide control over food production. If the book often reads as a crime story, that should come as no surprise. For that is what it is.

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