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In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STUDY RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT GENETICALLY-MODIFIED CROPS

The results of a three-year scientific study released this week in India show that farmers are worse off financially after they switch to genetically-modified crops.

The study, made public April 15 in the state of Andhra Pradesh by the Deccan Development Society, showed that farmers who grew Monsanto's genetically-modified Bt cotton between 2002 and 2005 had higher input costs and lower yields than farmers who grew non-GM cotton varieties. Andhra Pradesh is located on India's east coast and is a major producer of cotton for the country's textile industry.

The study also raised environmental red flags by documenting a link between soil contamination from Bt cotton and an increase in the incidence of "root rot" in cotton plants. A link was also established between Bt cotton and increased population and extended lifespan of a destructive pest known as the American Bollworm.

Colleen Ross, Women's Vice-President of the National Farmers Union (NFU) and a farmer from Iroquois, Ontario, is currently in India as part of a farmer exchange program. During her tour of the state of Andhra Pradesh, Ross outlined the efforts of Canadian farmers to counter the growing problem of contamination from GM crops.

Ross said the Andhra Pradesh study clearly proves that farmers are worse off when they become locked into technology-use contracts that are heavily weighted in favour of companies like Monsanto. Not only do they lose the ability to save their own seeds, they also suffer decreased returns, she pointed out. While the study focuses on a specific GM crop in India, similar conclusions are apparent in many other crops and many other countries, she said.

Jennifer Bromm of Saskatchewan is also in India as part of the Exchange to talk with farmers about the Organic Agriculture Protection Fund (OAPF) class action lawsuit launched against Monsanto and Aventis. The OAPF is seeking damages for organic canola farmers whose market was wiped out by the introduction of Monsanto's GM canola in the mid-1990s.

The study, entitled "Bt Cotton in Andhra Pradesh: a three year assessment", (www.ddsindia.com) documents the financial and environmental costs associated with Monsanto's Bt cotton, and compares those costs with non-GM cotton production in the same region.

Among the findings of the study:

1. Farmers had higher yields from non-Bt cotton, while their input costs for non-Bt cotton were lower than those for Bt cotton;
2. Monsanto's Bt cotton did not result in significantly reduced pesticide use;
3. The three-year average return for non-Bt farmers was 60% higher than for those farmers who raised Bt cotton;
4. Farmers who purchased Bt cotton seeds paid significantly more for their seed supply, and had to spend significantly greater time caring for and cultivating the Bt crop;
5. There was a significant increase in the incidence of root rot in soil which had been planted in previous years with Bt cotton; as well as an increase in the incidence and lifespan of a major pest, the American Bollworm.

The government of India approved three varieties[†] of Monsanto Bt cotton in 2002 for commercial production for a three-year trial period. Farmers are now demanding the government deny approval of Monsanto's application for an additional three-year license on these varieties. They are further demanding that Monsanto compensate farmers who grew Bt cotton under contract, and who are now suffering financially as a result.

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* Bt gene: *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) is a bacterium that produces a protein called the Bt toxin. One of the bacterium's genes, the Bt gene, carries the information for the Bt toxin. Inserting a copy of the Bt gene into plants enables them to produce Bt toxin protein and resist some pests.

† The three hybrid varieties were MECH-12, MECH-162 and MECH-184. The varieties were approved by the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee of the Ministry of Environments and Forests.