

It's 'The Real Thing' in Paraguay **The folks that brought you *Terminator* are now** **dumping *Originator* toxic seeds on farmers' fields**

As delegates to the Biodiversity Convention's scientific body (SBSTTA) convene in Montreal to contemplate a harsh new critique of Terminator Technology and their frustrated efforts to achieve a biosafety protocol, Terminator's many inventors are tripping over themselves sowing confusion and dumping mystery seeds 'dressed to kill'.

When the Biodiversity Convention's call last year for an investigation of Terminator Technology was followed by a repudiation of the Terminator by the world's largest public sector plant breeding network (CGIAR), the technology's numerous inventors began to back peddle. After all, commercial introduction of the seed sterilization technique was at least three years off. If governments and civil society critics could be pacified now, there would be time to position an effective lobby and PR strategy that would keep the Terminator 'on course' as the platform for all GMO plant breeding in the future.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, co-inventor of the original Terminator with Delta and Pine Land Co., for example, stated in a May 14 letter to the Biodiversity Convention that it would not use the technology to sterilize seeds. The U.S. said specifically that it would only explore the technology in areas "...unrelated to seed germination". This statement was in keeping with a USDA-RAFI meeting in February this year when the government acknowledged that they were besieged by public protest over USDA involvement with the unsavory technology. However, RAFI has uncovered a new USDA-Purdue University patent on Terminator technology issued on March 11th of this year. The new patent explicitly includes seed sterilization among its uses.

The Biodiversity Convention also received a letter from AstraZeneca dated February 24, 1999, in which the company categorically states that it abandoned the development of its Verminator technology for the purpose of seed sterilization in 1992. RAFI has learned that ExSeed, an AstraZeneca joint venture with Iowa State University, won a new seed sterilization patent on August 11, 1997, based on a claim made in 1995 – three years after this research was to have been abandoned.

Delegates to the Biodiversity Convention have also received a report from Monsanto, the Gene Giant that has agreed to buy Delta & Pine Land Company and its Terminator patent. Monsanto is calling for a full international evaluation of the patent prior to its commercialization. Not only has the company misled the public on its plans for this evaluation but it has withheld the fact that all along it has held a second Terminator-type patent of its own.

Now, Delta & Pine Land, which launched news stories on the original Terminator patent with proclamations of its benefits to poor farmers and world food security, has dumped hundreds of tonnes of unidentified cotton seed coated in highly-toxic chemicals in Paraguay. Whether or not the toxic seeds were failed genetic modification or Terminator field trials remains for the company to answer.

Seeds of Destruction -- Seed Scandal in Paraguay

While most of the world is focusing on Belgium's recent debacle with dioxin and with tainted Coke, toxic seed dumps in Paraguay are poisoning people, contaminating water supplies and devastating the rural community of Rincon I, approximately 120 kilometers from Asuncion. At least two toxic seed dumps have been identified in Paraguay, where massive quantities of Delta & Pine Land's "surplus" cotton seed were discarded by the company in November, 1998 and January, 1999.

According to Miguel Lovera, Coordinator of Biodiversity and Development for the Asuncion-based SOBREVIVENCIA - Friends of the Earth-Paraguay, "If Delta & Pine Land's toxic seeds were dumped in Belgium, or in the United States, the whole world would learn of its devastating consequences. In Paraguay, it's the real thing, but there's been no cleanup, no re-call, and no compensation for victims – just a pattern of extreme corporate negligence, cover-up and deception.

So far, the only help the people of Rincon I have received is the help of the Geneva -based International Union of Food and Agricultural Workers, the Asunción-based non-governmental organization AlterVida and SOBREVIVENCIA.

"The tragic irony," continues Lovera, "is that the biotech industry promised to clean up the environment and help feed hungry people. Instead, my country is being used as a dumping ground for high-tech seeds and deadly chemicals that are contaminating rural communities and endangering lives"

It is not known precisely why the Paraguayan government agreed in 1997 to import 85,000 bags of Delta & Pine cotton seed, enough to plant 170 thousand hectares, far exceeding the needs of Paraguayan cotton farmers at that time.

According to the Paraguayan press, up to 660 tonnes of Delta & Pine Land cotton seed were dumped in November 1998, and a second time in early 1999. The largest dump site is located in the rural community of Rincon I, approximately 170 metres from a local school. Despite widespread protest and national media coverage over the past six months, the company has failed to clean up the sites and compensate victims. At least one fatality has been reported in connection with the toxic seeds.

According to correspondence from Delta & Pine Land, field trials of at least seven of the company's genetically modified cotton seed varieties were conducted in Paraguay in the past three years. However, it is not known whether the toxic seed dumps contained genetically modified cotton varieties. One variety is branded "Originator" or "DeltaPine 50", a non-genetically modified variety.

The cotton seeds found at the dump site were reportedly coated with a cocktail of agro-toxins, including: Orthene (acefate - a systemic organophosphate), benlate, lorsban, Metalaxyl, baytan-Thirann and Kodiak -- which contains *Bacillus subtilis* A-13, a genetically modified bacterium. It is not unusual for high-tech, commercial cotton seed to be coated with fungicides and other agrochemicals. The massive quantity of discarded seeds concentrated on less than one hectare of land apparently resulted in the extreme toxicity of the site, and the danger to area residents.

Following a Paraguayan court ruling on the issue, Delta & Pine Land has reportedly admitted responsibility for the dumping, although it has failed to recognize the extreme toxicity of the site, suggesting that local farmers could use the blue-colored, toxic "seed soup" as green manure for fertilizing fields. According to the Paraguayan press, Delta & Pine Land prefers the cheaper option of offering compensation, rather than removing the deadly seeds and cleaning up the site.

Whether or not the toxic seed dump contained genetically modified varieties, the biosafety issue is undeniable. CBD's SBSTTA must address the tragedy in Paraguay, and the implications of irresponsible seed dumping in its biosafety negotiations. The Paraguayan experience underscores the urgent need to return to negotiations on the protocol and to ensure that agricultural seed and commodities, and their wider socio-economic consequences, be incorporated into the agreement.

Meanwhile, who will control seedy corporate activities in Paraguay?

1. Delta & Pine Land should publicly disclose all relevant information about all seeds that were dumped in Paraguay and the chemicals they were treated with, including:

- the names and volumes of all cotton varieties dumped, and information about all the chemicals used to treat them
 - whether these varieties or the materials used to treat them were genetically modified, and if so in what ways;
2. Delta & Pine Land should clean up the dump sites, as directed;
 3. Delta & Pine Land should provide for the health of all residents in the area of the dump sites to be monitored according to approved Pan American Health Organization or World Health Organization rules and procedures;
 4. Delta & Pine Land should compensate victims for negative health impacts, loss of livelihood and income, and should provide potable water for use by the community until an independent assessment deems the water in the area safe.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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