



RAFI

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News Release - 2 November 1998

Terminator Seeds Rejected by Global Network of Agriculture Experts

POLICY DESERVES PRAISE, NGOs AIM TO LEVERAGE CRYSTALLIZING GLOBAL RESISTANCE TO MONSANTO AND USDA'S TECHNOLOGY INTO MORE INTERNATIONAL POLICY ACTION

The Terminator - and related genetic seed sterilization technology - has been banned from the crop breeding programs of the world's largest international agricultural research network. The strong and unambiguous policy was adopted by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) at a meeting at the World Bank in Washington on Friday, October 30th.

"It's a courageous decision. The CGIAR has done the right thing, for the right reasons," says Pat Mooney, Executive Director of RAFI, *"a ban on Terminator is a pro-farmer policy in defence of world food security."*

The CGIAR is a global network of 16 international agricultural research centres, which collectively form the world's largest public plant breeding effort for resource-poor farmers. The Terminator genetic engineering technique renders farm-saved seed sterile, forcing farmers to return to the commercial seed market every year. The technology is aimed primarily at seed markets in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where over 1.4 billion people depend on farm-saved seed and on-farm plant breeding. If widely adopted, the Terminator would make it impossible for farmers to save seed and breed their own crops.

Multiple Objections: The CGIAR sees the potential for the Terminator to have negative consequences for food security, genetic diversity, biosafety, sustainable agriculture, and plant breeding. Terminator opponents, who are pleased with the new policy, point out that the experts' opinion coincides with key points civil society organizations have been making since the Terminator controversy broke open globally seven months ago. Specifically, the CGIAR cites the following reasons for the ban (full CGIAR text is provided at end):

- *IMPORTANCE OF FARM-MADE SEED, PARTICULARLY FOR POOR FARMERS*
- *NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON GENETIC DIVERSITY*
- *IMPORTANCE OF FARMER BREEDING FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE*
- *POSSIBLE SALE OR EXCHANGE OF INVIABLE SEED FOR PLANTING*
- *BIOSAFETY RISKS OF INADVERTENT SPREAD THROUGH POLLEN*

Since the Terminator was developed jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Delta & Pine Land, a Monsanto subsidiary, Mooney says the policy is *"a slap in the face to the US Government - a major CGIAR funder - and to Monsanto because it soundly negates their claims that sterilizing seeds will boost plant breeding in marginal areas and help feed the hungry."* Mooney adds, *"The defenders of biotechnology's suicide seeds are certainly powerful; but they must be feeling pretty lonely."*

Swift Adoption: Adoption of the CGIAR policy to ban Terminator was uncharacteristically swift, with barely a whiff of resistance from member states and donors attending the annual meeting. Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, the chair of CGIAR's Genetic Resources Policy Committee and World Food Prize recipient, presented the anti-Terminator proposal to all the delegates at the meeting in its final hours, making a passionate plea for acceptance of the policy.

In the ensuing discussion, numerous delegates from the South and the North alike endorsed the ban on Terminator. The Ugandan delegate said that the Terminator was a concern at the highest political level in his country. Representatives from Zimbabwe, India, UK, and the Netherlands also made statements favoring the anti-Terminator policy. It was agreed that CGIAR scientists might retain the option to study the technology in the laboratory - without aims to release it to farmers; but it was only Canada's delegate who expressed reservations about the policy.

Americans Silent: Most surprising of all was the deafening silence from embarrassed US government officials, who were expected to vehemently defend the technology on behalf of Monsanto and the multinational seed industry. The silence has lent credence to rumours circulating at the meeting and on the

internet that the USDA is getting cold feet about the Terminator and, in the face of public pressure, may decide to not use it in plants it releases to US farmers. *"If true, the policy would be welcomed,"* says RAFI Research Director Hope Shand, *"but it would not put the controversy to rest. Opponents of Terminator would question why USDA would admit that the technology is unacceptable for release to US farmers, while on the other hand surrender the patent rights to Monsanto for commercial development. How could the technology be bad for US farmers and good for farmers in the rest of the world?"*

Increasing Opposition fits into Global Campaign: RAFI, working with NGOs and peoples' organizations worldwide, sees the CGIAR policy as an important early fruit of their campaign to stop commercialization of terminator seeds entirely. In collaboration with NGOs and peoples' organizations worldwide, RAFI is pursuing multiple strategies aimed at terminating the Terminator:

- **Cease, Abandon, and Ban:** In the past month, over 2400 people from 57 countries have used RAFI's website to write the US Secretary of Agriculture to express concern about the Terminator. RAFI's Edward Hammond says *"We, our NGO partners, and the thousands of letter writers will continue to put the electronic heat on USDA until it does three things: Cease negotiations to license the US government's interest in the Terminator to Monsanto. Abandon all patents and patent applications - in up to 87 countries - on the technology. Ban use of the technology in the US and ensure that the US does not interfere with foreign governments who do the same."*
- **Invocation of Public Morality Rights:** With the weight of the CGIAR policy, India's ban on the technology, and a burgeoning list of civil society, scientific, and local government opponents, RAFI and partners will be approaching governments worldwide to propose that they block the terminator patent and ban terminator seeds. Under the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) agreement (part of GATT), countries have the right to ban patents like the Terminator on the grounds of public morality, including environmental concerns. Moreover, Mooney says *"We have suggestions for how governments can place the Terminator into broader strategies for food security that can be pursued in TRIPs negotiations and through the International Court of Justice. We hope that the global repugnance over the Terminator can be the catalyst for positive, practical action to help stop patents from hurting farmers, biodiversity, and food security."*
- **UN Biodiversity Agenda:** The CGIAR policy will be very influential at May's meeting of the scientific branch of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which has been charged with reviewing the Terminator technology's implications and making recommendations about it for consideration by the over 170 governments that are parties to the global biodiversity agreement. A representative of the CBD attended the CGIAR meeting. *"The CBD should consider the CGIAR policy very carefully"* says Hammond, *"With global opposition crystalizing in government, scientific, and civil society circles, and in the absence of any credible biodiversity-promoting rationale for the technology, it is clear that recommendation should be for a ban."*

CGIAR's policy statement, as presented by the Genetic Resources Policy Committee:

"The CGIAR will not incorporate into its breeding materials any genetic systems designed to prevent seed germination. This is in recognition of (a) concerns over potential risks of its inadvertent or unintended spread through pollen; (b) the possibilities of sale or exchange of inviable seed for planting; (c) the importance of farm-saved seed, particularly to resource-poor farmers; (d) potential negative impacts on genetic diversity and (e) the importance of farmer selection and breeding for sustainable agriculture."

For More Information/Contacts:

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