

RAFI
GENO-TYPES
22 May 1998

RAFI Launches Postcard Campaign to Oppose Basmati Rice Patent

Thousands Drop A Line to the Prince Urging Him to Drop the Patent

On Tuesday, 12 May at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia, RAFI officially launched an international postcard campaign aimed at Prince Hans Adam II, the Prince of Liechtenstein. The Prince is the chairman of the RiceTec Group, whose Texas-based subsidiary, RiceTec Inc., holds the controversial patent on Basmati rice (#5,663,484).

Hundreds of NGOs and government delegates attending the COP IV meeting in Bratislava were eager to sign postcards and mail them to Prince Hans-Adam II. "The Prince needs to be held accountable. He made a mistake, and he can correct the situation by dropping the patent," said RAFI's Edward Hammond. "We're certain that the Prince will get the message because he'll be receiving thousands of postcards printed in English, German and Spanish from concerned individuals and civil society organizations all over the world," explained RAFI's Hammond.

Users of the World Wide Web can go here to check out RAFI's colorful postcard to Prince Hans-Adam II: <http://www.rafi.ca/misc/postcard.html>

RAFI's postcard campaign is the latest in a series of civil society protests of the Basmati rice patent. The controversial patent, issued in September 1997, lays claim to Asia's famous aromatic Basmati rice. The patent covers Basmati grown anywhere in the Western Hemisphere, and effectively claims ownership of traditional Pakistani or Indian Basmati strains when crossed with the company's proprietary lines. For further details, see RAFI's 1 April 1998 GenoTypes on the Basmati patent. [Carole – put link here to the earlier basmati genotypes]

The Indian and Pakistani governments have vowed to fight the US patent, which is viewed as a threat to the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of farming families in India, Pakistan and Nepal who grow Basmati rice for export. When news of the patent reached New Delhi, over 50,000 Indians protested in front of the US Embassy. In India alone, basmati rice exports are valued at (US) \$800 million per annum. Over 80% of Basmati rice grown in India is produced for export.

A wide coalition of Southeast Asian NGOs and Peoples' Movements recently denounced the Basmati rice patent at the World Trade Organization. The coalition called on WTO member states to recognize that farmers' and community rights have precedence over intellectual property rights and that IPRs destroy biodiversity.

JOIN US! Send your own message to the Prince of Liechtenstein! Here's the complete text of RAFI's pre-printed postcard and the Prince's address:

TO: H.S.H. Prince Hans-Adam II
Schloss Vaduz
FL-9490 Vaduz
Liechtenstein

Dear Prince Hans-Adam II,

Because you are the Chairman of the RiceTec Group, whose Texas, USA subsidiary owns the controversial US patent (#5,663,484) on basmati rice, I am writing to urge that your company immediately abandon this unjust and dangerous patent.

RiceTec's basmati patent appropriates the resources and knowledge of Asian farmers – a fact that has alarmed people around the world. South Asian farmers have cultivated and developed basmati rice for centuries. Your company's patent directly threatens the livelihoods of thousands of farming families in India, Pakistan, and Nepal who cultivate Basmati rice for export and is demeaning to millions of other small farmers worldwide who select, improve and conserve crop diversity.

I believe you should abandon the basmati rice patent, and cease using the "basmati" label for rice products produced by RiceTec and its subsidiaries under the protection of this predatory intellectual property claim.

I hope you will agree that supporting agricultural genetic diversity and the genius of small farmers is a global priority. RiceTec has made a mistake. It is within your power to act and to correct this grave injustice. Please abandon the basmati rice patent.

Sincerely,

ESPANOL:

Estimado Principe Hans-Adam II,

Debido a que usted es el Presidente de RiceTec Group, cuya subsidiaria de Texas es propietaria de la controversial patente estadounidense sobre arroz basmati (#5,663,484), me dirijo a Ud. Para solicitarle encarecidamente que su compañía renuncie a esa patente injusta y peligrosa.

La patente de RiceTec sobre basmati se apropia de los recursos y el conocimiento de los campesinos asiáticos, hecho que ha suscitado alarma en el mundo entero. Los agricultores del sur asiático han cultivado y desarrollado el arroz basmati durante siglos. La patente de su compañía amenaza directamente

el sustento de cientos de miles de familias de campesinos en India, Pakistán, y Nepal que cultivan el arroz basmati para exportación y está degradando a otros millones de agricultores pequeños en el mundo entero que selecciona, mejoran y conservan la diversidad de cultivos.

Considero que Ud. debería desistir de la patente sobre el arroz basmati y dejar de usar la etiqueta "basmati" para productos de arroz producidos por RiceTec y sus subsidiarias bajo la protección de ese depredador derecho de propiedad intelectual.

Espero que Ud. esté de acuerdo en que apoyar la diversidad genética agrícola y el ingenio de los pequeños agricultores es una prioridad global. RiceTec ha cometido un error. Está en sus manos actuar y corregir esa grave injusticia. Por favor desista de la patente sobre el arroz basmati.

Atentamente,

GERMAN:

Sehr geehrter Prinz Hans-Adam II

Weil Sie den Vorsitz der RiceTec-Gruppe innehaben, deren Niederlassung in Texas (USA) das umstrittene US-Patent (No. 5,663,484) auf Basmati-Reis besitzt, gelange ich hier an Sie: Bitte sorgen Sie dafür, dass Ihre Firma auf das ungerechte und gefährliche Patent verzichtet.

Mit diesem Patent eignet sich RiceTec die Ressourcen und das Wissen asiatischer Bäuerinnen und Bauern an –eine Tatsache, die Menschen rund um die Welt schockiert hat. Südasiatische Bauern haben den Basmati-Reis über Jahrhunderte hinweg kultiviert und gezüchtet. Das Patent Ihrer Firma bedroht nun unmittelbar die Lebensgrundlage von hunderttausenden Bauernfamilien aus Indien, Pakistan und Nepal, die Basmati-Reis für den Export anbauen. Das Patent bedeutet auch eine Erniedrigung all jener Millionen Kleinbauern, die auf der ganzen Welt Saatgut züchten, verbessern und konservieren.

Ich möchte Sie bitten, dieses Patent aufzugeben. Ferner ersuche ich Sie, das Markenzeichen "Basmati" nicht mehr für jene Reisprodukte zu verwenden, die unter diesen Patentschutz fallen.

Ich hoffe, Sie gehen mit mir einig, dass der Erhaltung der Artenvielfalt und des "Know-hows" von Kleinbauern eine weltweite Priorität zukommt. RiceTec hat einen Fehler gemacht. Es liegt nun an Ihnen, diese gradierende Ungerechtigkeit zu korrigieren. Bitte verzichten Sie auf das Basmati-Reis-Patent.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

