



RAFI

Rural Advancement Foundation International
www.rafi.org | rafi@rafi.org

News Release -28 April 1999

Terminator Technology Selected as one of Project Censored's Top Under-Reported News Stories

RAFI Awarded "Pulitzer Prize of Investigative Reporting"

Terminator Technology has been selected by Project Censored (California, USA) as one of the most important, under-reported news stories in the mainstream media in 1998. Terminator refers to a controversial genetic technology that renders farm-saved seed sterile, forcing farmers to purchase crop seed annually.

RAFI's Pat Mooney and Hope Shand will receive an award on behalf of RAFI in New York City on April 29 for their article on Terminator Technology and its impact on farmers and global food security. RAFI's article appeared in Pesticide Action Network's *Global Pesticide Campaigner*, and in the *Earth Island News*.

The awards, commonly referred to as the alternative Pulitzer Prize of investigative reporting, were selected by a panel of 25 judges. Of 25 issues selected, Terminator was ranked the third most significant. (The top two under-reported stories were identified as the secretive Multilateral Agreement on Investment and corporate profits from breast cancer.)

Global Furor: The controversial patent on genetic seed sterilization was identified and immediately dubbed "Terminator" technology by RAFI in March, 1998. The specter of genetic seed sterilization has generated an avalanche of public opposition, and now it's page one news in many of the world's leading newspapers, including recent feature articles in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Harper's*, and *TIME*. "In recent months, Terminator has gone from under-reported news to headline news, and it's because of the hard work and cooperation of civil society organizations, scientists and South governments who are working worldwide to ban the technology," said Pat Mooney of RAFI.

Over 10,000 individuals from 71 countries have written letters of protest to the Food and Agriculture Organization and to the US Department of Agriculture about Terminator. The USDA and a Monsanto subsidiary jointly hold a patent on Terminator technology. Individuals and organizations are demanding that FAO protect farm-based food security, and that USDA cease negotiations with Monsanto on the exclusive licensing of the Terminator patent.

"Internationally, public sentiment is overwhelmingly against Terminator because it's bad for farmers, global food security and the environment; it's not about improving agriculture or helping farmers, it's only about increasing seed industry profits," notes RAFI's Shand.

The Terminator technology has generated fierce opposition, especially in the South, where one and a half billion people depend on farm-saved seed and local plant breeding. Governments, civil society organizations and scientists are seeking a ban on the Terminator technology at the local, national and international levels.

- The world's largest international agricultural research network has adopted a policy banning the use of Terminator technology in its plant breeding programs.
- African delegates to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization have said they don't want Terminator genes used on African soil.
- India's agriculture minister says that he will ban the import of seeds containing the Terminator gene.
- Terminator is on the agenda of at least two United Nations agencies.
- Wageningen University of the Netherlands, the world's premiere agricultural university, has vowed not to use Terminator technology.

"If governments are provided with the facts, they will reject Terminator technology," concludes RAFI's Mooney. Under the World Trade Organization rules, governments may reject patents in order to protect public morality and the environment.

Beyond Terminator: In early 1999 RAFI revealed that virtually all of the world's largest seed and agrochemical corporations are working on the goal of genetic seed sterilization. Over two dozen new patents reveal that engineered seed sterility is not an isolated research agenda. The new generation of Terminator patents describe techniques involving external chemical "inducers" to turn on and off a plant's traits. RAFI calls it "Traitor Technology." Crops are being engineered so that they won't grow properly unless exposed to the company's proprietary pesticide, fertilizer or herbicide. "Remote control of a plant's genetic traits, triggered by proprietary chemicals, is a brilliant marketing strategy for companies who sell seeds and agrochemicals, but it's grim news for farmers and the environment," explains Edward Hammond of RAFI. "We want to make sure that Traitor Technology is not one of the most under-reported news stories of 1999," adds Hammond, who played a major role in investigating the new technology.

For RAFI's newest report on Traitor technology, and in-depth background on Terminator, visit RAFI's web site: <http://www.rafi.org>

For More Information

Pat Mooney, Executive Director, RAFI, tel: 204 453-5259 rafi@rafi.org

Hope Shand, Research Director, tel: 717 337-6482 hope@rafi.org

Edward Hammond, Program Officer, tel: 206 323-7378 hammond@rafi.org

RAFI, the Rural Advancement Foundation International, is an international civil society organization headquartered in Canada. RAFI is dedicated to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and to the socially responsible development of technologies useful to rural societies. RAFI is concerned about the loss of agricultural biodiversity, and the impact of intellectual property on farmers and food security.