



ETC Group
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Surge in Corporate Patents on “Climate-Ready” Crops Threaten Biodiversity and Signal Grab on Land and Biomass

Nagoya, Japan -- Under the guise of developing “climate-ready” crops, the world’s largest seed and agrochemical corporations are filing hundreds of sweeping, multi-genome patents in a bid to control the world’s plant biomass, according to a report released by ETC Group today.

A handful of multinational corporations are pressuring governments to allow what could become the broadest and most dangerous patent claims in history, warns the group at the United Nations’ Convention on Biodiversity in Nagoya, Japan (18-29 October 2010).

“The Gene Giants are stockpiling patents that threaten to put a choke-hold on the world’s biomass and our future food supply,” warns Silvia Ribeiro of ETC Group. “The breadth of many patent claims on climate ready crop genes is staggering. In many cases, a single patent or patent application claims ownership of engineered gene sequences that could be deployed in virtually all major crops – as well as the processed food and feed products derived from them,” explains Ribeiro.

ETC Group identifies over 262 patent families, subsuming 1663 patent documents published worldwide (both applications and issued patents) that make specific claims on environmental stress tolerance in plants (such as drought, heat, flood, cold, salt tolerance). DuPont, Monsanto, BASF, Bayer, Syngenta and their biotech partners account for three-quarters (77%) of the patent families identified. Just three companies – DuPont, BASF, Monsanto – account for over two-thirds of the total. Public sector researchers hold only 10%.

“In a desperate bid for moral legitimacy and to try to ease public acceptance of genetically modified crops, the Gene Giants have donated a few proprietary crop genes to poor farmers in Africa,” explains Ribeiro.

“The quid pro quo is that South governments must facilitate market access for genetically modified crops and embrace biotech-friendly patent laws. It’s an unacceptable trade-off. In exchange for untested technologies, South governments are being pressured to surrender national sovereignty over intellectual property, biomass, and food,” she warned.

“These patents are the latest form of biopiracy,” notes Vandana Shiva, Director of India’s Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology. “Farmers have bred seeds for

drought, flood and salt tolerance over millennia. Climate resilience ultimately depends on farmers' innovation, biodiversity and agro-ecological processes staying in the hands of farming communities," said Shiva.

"Governments meeting at the UN Biodiversity Convention in Nagoya, Japan must put a stop to the patent grab, yet another false solution to climate change. They should instruct their patent offices to reject or rescind all of these patents," said ETC Group's Neth Daño, who is attending the meeting. "A fundamental review of all intellectual property claims in agriculture should be jointly undertaken by the CBD and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). These patents also clearly violate the FAO Seed Treaty and its governing body must investigate and take action."

ETC Group's report *Gene Giants Stockpile Patents on "Climate-Ready" Crops in Bid to Become Biomasters* will be released and discussed at a side event in Nagoya, Japan on 25 October (4:30 pm, Room 236, Bldg 2, 3rd floor).

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