

**The Right to Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty Campaign's objection to
Monsanto's application for a time extension of an existing permit for activities with
GMOs Drought Tolerant Maize in South Africa – Trail Release**

1 June 2010

1. Introduction

We are the Right to Agrarian Reform for Food Sovereignty Campaign or the Food Sovereignty Campaign in short. We are a movement of emerging farmers, poor farm dwellers/workers active in the Western, Northern and Eastern Cape. In the Western Cape we are particularly active in the West Coast District Municipal area with membership in the Matzikama municipal area of which Lutzville is one of the towns. The problems facing our people includes amongst other things:

Land hunger – we do not have enough food or good enough land, food insecurity – we do not have enough or healthy enough food and food powerlessness – we do not have enough power to make decisions about producing, distributing, preparing and consuming food.

The underlying causes of our problems are among others:

The effects of colonialism and Apartheid that we never repaired, the constitution that protects the property rights of white, rich landowners and agribusiness, the chemical industrial model of agriculture that promotes the concentration of land ownership, maximum use of pesticides, monocropping and biotechnologies such as genetically modified organisms and the market driven system that creates a class of rich property owners with the right to exploit the rest of society and that makes maximum profit the supreme goal of economic activity instead of meeting of human needs.

As the Food Sovereignty Campaign we fight for:

Agrarian reform that takes the farm land away from the current racist, sexist, greedy owners and share it among the people on a equitable basis, food sovereignty – enough good food for everyone including democracy and freedom in decision making about food. No more control by business corporations. Control by all people. Agro ecology – a way of doing agriculture that does away with the unequal land access, environmental damage, racism and sexism of the current chemical industrial model of agriculture.

As a movement of emerging farmers, farm worker/ dwellers, landless people and the rural poor we want to raise our concerns and place on record our categorical objection and rejection of the application for a time extension of an existing permit by Monsanto S.A. (PTY) Ltd for the trail release of drought tolerant GM Maize in the Lutzville area of the Western Cape particularly and in other areas of South Africa designated by the application dated version 1 July 2009. Our concerns, objection and rejection of the application are based on the reasons outlined below.

2. Community Consent and Public Participation

Genetically modified crops were introduced into South Africa in 1997 without the consent and public participation of the South African population. This constitutes a fundamental violation of our human rights, particularly our right to democratic participation. Given the nature of the technology and the associated risks, community consent and participation becomes critical. The way in which advertisements and applications are structured is inadequate for black communities to understand and meaningfully engage with the technology, particularly whether they want this technology in the first place.

In the case of Lutzville GM maize trails were conducted without the consent of the community and small scale farmers in the area who are practicing agro ecological farming. We find this racist and paternalist, particularly since it involves the genetic modification of our staple food maize, which is predominantly being consumed by black people, who in most cases are not aware of what they are eating

3. Seed and Food Sovereignty Undermined

The introduction of bio-technologies like drought resistant maize for South Africa and Sub Saharan Africa undermines the seed and food sovereignty of the countries people and farmers. Seed saving is an important component of farmers in Sub Saharan Africa and South Africa in particular. This technology would further deskill and destroy the farming practices of poor black farmers. In our view the primary objective of Monsanto's application is to control the seed chain and thereby the entire food chain. Recent studies have indicated that during the food price crisis multinational companies like Monsanto has increased their profits by more than 40%, while vast numbers of the populations of the world have experienced chronic poverty and hunger.

In South Africa evidence are already emerging in the Eastern Cape and Kwa Zulu Natal that this technology is further placing people in debt and undermining poor black people's food sovereignty. In the Eastern Cape GM maize is offered to small scale farmers through the Massive Food Production Programme. This forced farmers from traditional farming methods towards growing monocropping of patented seed with chemicals. This has resulted in increasing levels of debt, loss of food security, increased used of chemicals. The same evidence have emerged in Northern Kwa Zulu Natal when farmers were introduced to GM cotton in the Makhatini Flats.

The primary objective of GM food is not to assist small scale farmers but to maximize profits for companies like Monsanto and in the process destroy the livelihoods of poor black farmers. We find the complicit role of the state in advancing the interest of these multinational organisations to the detriment of its citizens as indicative of the apartheid style of rule without the democratic participation of its citizens.

In essence this is part of the Green Revolution that is being proposed for Africa. In 2009 our members had an exchange visit to India to study the impact of the green revolution on the Indian farmers. The only true beneficiaries of the green revolution were the multi national companies that have locked farmers into a vicious cycle of debt. The end result is a high rate of suicide of farmers in India.

Thus we call on the government to redirect research institutions like the ARC to conduct research to support alternative production systems like agro ecology. Currently the ARC is advancing the agenda of multinational corporations like Monsanto that negatively impact on farmers. Institutes like the ARC should be accountable to the people and not a body that undermine our seed and food sovereignty.

4. The aims of Monsanto

Monsanto claims that the aim of this GMO experiment is to develop drought resistant maize. Yet in their own documents they admit that they do not expect this maize to produce greater yields in dry conditions than unmodified maize. Also they claim the maize in question will be developed specifically for use by small scale farmers, whom they say will not be charged royalties for the use of the seeds. But they have not consulted small scale farmers, and they neglect to say that the farmers will be required to buy these seeds from Monsanto every season and will not be able to become independent of this corporation through storing seeds for example. This is a well established practice of Monsanto all over the world.

The true aims of these experiments is to assist Monsanto to increase profits through gaining control over maize seeds and thereby forcing small farmers to buy from it. It will increase hunger by increasing inequality because money will flow from poor small farmers to this rich corporation. It will undermine food sovereignty as the production of a staple crop will be under the control of the small number of rich people that control Monsanto, instead of in the hands of society as a whole.

5 Health and safety risks

The health and safety risks of GMO foods and this maize in particular are largely unknown to most people. When we visited the site of the Agricultural Research Council's experiment in Lutzville with drought resistant GMO maize there were big notices on display that stated the maize were unfit for human and animal consumption. Yet the application does not indicate this and the reasons why humans and animals should not eat it. Why develop maize that is not fit to be eaten?

Studies by Dr. Arpad Pustzai, biochemist have shown that "processes of genetic engineering of the potato caused rats to develop potentially precancerous cell growth in the digestive tract, inhibited development of the brain, liver and testicles, caused partial atrophy of the liver, enlarged pancreas and intestines; immune system

damage” (quoted by Don Lotter, 'Genetic Engineering of Food and the failure of science,' August 2009, Food First). Moreover Pustzai points out that scientific findings indicates that genetic modification can have potentially harmful consequences for the immune system of animals ingesting diets containing GM ingredients (Arpad Pusztai and Susan Bardocz, 2009 (draft version) Safety considerations on Genetically Modified Food Crops, IBSA civil Society Platform). This is similar to reports we have received from farmers in the Eastern Cape whose animals were negatively affected after grazing in gm maize fields.

Other scientific studies have shown that GMOs in food can cause a number of illnesses. These include stunted growth, impaired immune systems, bleeding stomachs, mishappen cell structures in different organs, liver and kidney lesions, reduced digestive enzymes and inflamed lung tissue. At the very least more tests are necessary. But until then experiments that carry the risk of introducing GMOs in the food chain or the environment should be strictly forbidden.

6. Risks to the environment

The South African government has granted over 2000 permits for GM crops since 1997 but the first study on the environmental impacts of GM maize were only done in 2009. What was the result? We don't know, but we do know it would be irresponsible to approve further experimentation with GM maize before we understand the possible environmental impact. Three of Monsanto's GM maize crops failed to form cobs, leaving the mealie fields barren. No explanation was given and no action taken.

In general ecological factors are a significant concern with GM crops because of the build up of weed resistance to herbicides, this as a result of substantial increase in use, and the environmental effects of pesticide crops. We cannot entrust the health of the environment to profit-hungry corporations. They have shown time and time again they will prioritise their profits even if it means damaging the environment. In this regard we concur with the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee National Assembly on Rural Development and land reform that who last year at a civil society dialogue with parliamentarians indicated that citizens in South Africa are not able to meaningfully participate in the debate because of a lack of information. He further stated that the ultimate thinking behind this technology is modernisation although it is causing damage in the country and the world

7. Agro ecology - the Alternative

Agro ecology is an alternative to this model of agriculture, which we as a campaign are advocating for as the way of small scale farmers in South Africa. It means rejecting an agriculture based on a few rich, white people owning most of the land, chemical pesticides, GMOs, monocropping, cheap Black and female labour and chasing maximum profit. We want a system of agriculture where the land is own equitably by those that

work on it, where labour is justly rewarded and fairly divided with no priviledges to whites and males, and where the environment is protected through organic farming, crop rotation and the promotion of bio-diversity.

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact Danie Engelbrecht on 073 232 0901 or fax on 027 718 1302.