

COMMENT

Seeds of Destruction

WHAT IS PRESENTLY CLASSIFIED as semi-arid region in Rajasthan will soon turn arid, and barren. In a region where water is a scarce commodity, water guzzling hybrids will now be promoted with impunity. MONSANTO has been handed-over the reigns of Rajasthan's agriculture, and in other words its food security. It is common sense that semi-arid regions are not suitable for water-consuming hybrid crops. But Rajasthan government in league with MONSANTO is just reversing traditional agricultural practice to sow the seeds of destruction.

MONSANTO has allegedly signed an agreement with the Rajasthan Government in July, 2010 to engage in public-private partnership to develop and market hybrid seeds of maize, cotton and vegetables like hot pepper, tomato, cabbage, cucumber, cauliflower and water melon. The MoU has been signed on behalf of the State Government with Department of Agriculture, Department of Horticulture, Swami Keshavanand Rajasthan Agriculture University, Maharana Pratap University of Agriculture and Technology, and Rajasthan University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences.

With MONSANTO virtually taking over seed production and distribution, and at the same time being allowed to use the research and extension services of the State and the universities along with the Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) for disseminating the farm technologies, one may wonder what role and task is left for the agricultural universities. If the universities have to be simply subservient to MONSANTO, and be the executing agencies, isn't it time to close down these universities and save the tax-payers' money? Why should the tax-payers bear the cost of providing supporting services which basically adds to the commercial gains of the private seed giant with notorious record in many a third world country.

While the objectives include contributing to the agricultural economy through enhanced yields, encouraging cultivation of crops beneficial to farmers, the Rajasthan government has promised to bring in policies and programmes to make this possible by encouraging seed multiplication and distribution. Besides seed production and processing, MONSANTO will engage in developing its proprietary germplasm in collaboration with the universities for which it will charge prescribed fee. Both the partners—MONSANTO and Rajasthan government—will undertake feasibility studies and assessment to ensure that the hybrid seeds enter the seed value chain.

Hybrids are water-guzzling crops consuming roughly 1.5 times more water than the high-yielding varieties and increasing the dependence on chemicals and fertilisers. It's part of the game called neo-liberalism and Rajasthan government looks determined to destroy Rajasthan's semi-arid agriculture for all times to come.

[contributed]