

OUR SEEDS – OUR FUTURE

On the occasion of

International Seed Day, April 26, 2015

One of the most negative results of the commercialisation of agriculture is the total dependence by the farmer on external sources for all his farming inputs, including seeds. Whereas earlier farmers used to save and share their seeds, today they depend wholly upon seed companies for their requirements. Indigenous seeds are more suitable to a particular region or situation than any hybrid variety.

There are a number of reasons why it makes sense to use indigenous or traditional seeds (called heirloom seeds in the West). Compared to hybrid seeds, they are hardy, pest-resistant, withstand unfavorable conditions in the area of their origin, require less water and nutritional inputs, fit in better in the organic method of farming and may even have special characteristics such as nutrition, fragrance or colour.

Hybrid seeds on the other hand are developed for very specific situations and have precise water and nutritional requirements, generally on the higher side. They are also more prone to pest attacks and diseases. Besides being costlier, hybrids cannot be saved or shared with any benefit to the farmers. In fact, even where improved varieties are not hybrids, it is usually illegal for farmers to save or share such seeds. In some western countries, it is now illegal for farmers to share or sell even their local seed varieties on the grounds that the seeds are not certified!

However, all this does not mean that just about any indigenous seed should be freely used by farmers. As with hybrids, all varieties are not suitable for commercial cultivation. Many farmers save seeds selectively after seeing the vigour and growth of individual plants. This is an old tradition and is and needs to be continued.

Seeds hold a special place in the struggle for food sovereignty. These small grains are the basis for the future. They shape, at each life cycle, the type of food people eat, how it is grown, and who grows it.

Despite the industry's dominance and continuing efforts to marginalize and even criminalize small-scale peasant and family farming, our seeds have deeper roots.

Everywhere, seeds are being reclaimed and brought back as a central part of life in communities, even in cities. They are the basis for a sustainable, healthy and just agriculture.

Peasant and farmers' seeds are under threat of extinction. If we do not change the course history is taking, our children will not be able to produce their own food.

Peasant, local, community, subsistence and family farming still produce 75% of the food that is consumed on the planet, and 90% of non-mechanized nonmotorized farmers of the world produce the majority of their seeds themselves.

This situation is intolerable to transnational corporations, which have decided to put an end to it. They have already carried out this program in rich countries where some "improved" industrial varieties, almost identical to one another, have replaced the great diversity of peasant and farmers' seeds in the fields. Now they want to extend this policy to the rest of the world.

Cultivation of traditional crop varieties is decreasing day by day, the major reason being low productivity compared to the high yielding varieties (HYV).

Traditional varieties of seeds are much more resilient and reduce the plants' vulnerability to pests and local climatic stresses

The only way to encourage farmers to grow these is to create a market for them and make consumers aware about the speciality and nutritional aspects of these crops.

To conserve an indigenous variety we have to ensure its cultivation, consumption and commerce.

To strengthen the great tradition of our seed keeping in this country we need to firmly resolve that we are going back to our traditional seed systems and strengthen farmers hands in retaining them and fight Government laws and policies which pro-corporate have to be driven back. We must act now to make this possible through farmers meetings, public meetings, media conferences, rallies and demonstrations.

Come, Let us make the voices of our farmers resound all over the country so that their views and seeds get a priority over corporate seeds on the Indian agrarian landscape. JAI HIND !!