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PRESS RELEASE

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After ten years of its cultivation in India, Bt Cotton has now been described from being a **super flop** to an **economic and ecological disaster**.

Why is it a **super flop**? Let us consider some trends over the last ten years, since Bt cotton was introduced in India in 2002. This decadal experience clearly tells us that in the five years before Bt cotton spread onto 90% of India's cotton landscape, the yield jump was 39% which was phenomenal by all accounts. But we must remember that in this spectacular yield increase, Bt cotton can claim very little share since it was being cultivated only on 1.1% cotton area in 2003-4 and just about 5.7% in 2004-5. Obviously non Bt Cotton cultivated in the rest of 94% of area contributed to this great boom in cotton production until the yield reached 470kgs/lint cotton per acre.

YEAR	Bt SHARE IN ARE OF CULTIVATION	YIELD KGS/LINT PER HECTARE	NET INCREASE YoY KGS/LINT PER HECTARE
2002-03	Base Year	309	0
2003-04	1.10%	399	90
2004-05	5.70%	470	71
2007-08	62.00%	524	55
2008-09	84.00%	486	-38
2009-10	85.00%	474	-12

Courtesy: Cotton Advisory Board

What happened since?

Fast forward to 2012. In 2009-10, when Bt Cotton spread to 85% of India's cotton landscape, the yield was 474 kgs of lint cotton/Ha., just 4 kgs per hectare. A laughable increase indeed considering the enormous hype and hoopla surrounding it, [See table below] even while cotton farmers are spending nearly 50% more on inputs compared to their conventional cotton cultivation.

In Vidarbha alone, at least one Bt Cotton farmer commits suicide every day, busting the myth of Bt cotton bringing prosperity to cotton farmers.

These harsh facts forced the Ministry of Agriculture issue an advisory to State Departments of Agriculture that says "Cotton farmers are in a deep crisis since shifting to Bt cotton.

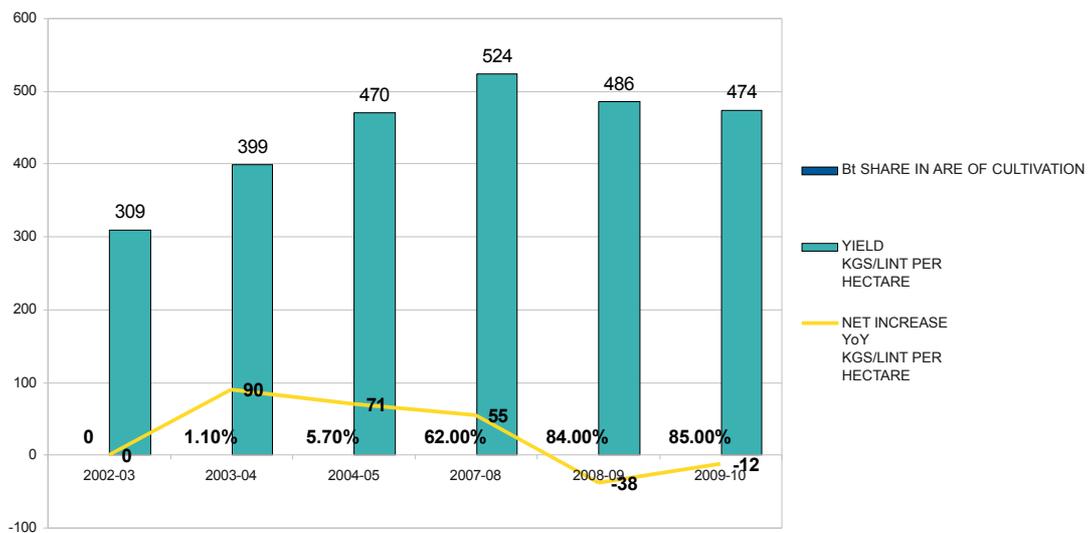
The spate of farmer suicides in 2011-12 has been particularly severe among Bt cotton farmers. In fact cost of cotton cultivation has jumped...due to rising costs of pesticides. Total Bt cotton production in the last five years has reduced,” says the advisory which is based on observations from the Indian Council of Agricultural Sciences, which administers farm science, and the Central Cotton Research Institute, the country's top cotton research facility.

But very strangely the very Minister who heads the ministry, contradicts his own Ministry’s advisory: “Cotton production has risen from 164 lakh bales in 2004-05 to 340 lakh bales in 2011-12”, he said replying to a question in Rajya Sabha on March 30, 2012."This is clear cut indication that there is higher production (after use of Bt-cotton)" he went on to say.

But what Mr Pawar failed to mention is that since 2005 in just six years India has added 25 lakh more acres under cotton cultivation. More and more cotton cultivation is being done on **irrigated conditions** than before, especially in states like Gujarat who boast of very high cotton production. Both these factors account for a large percentage of yield increase claimed by the minister. Glorifying Bt cotton for this credit is totally undue. If any, the yields under Bt cotton is decreasing since last five years instead of showing an upward trend.

The same alarming trend has been reported in AP also. According to state government estimates in December 2011, during the Kharif 2011 season in Andhra Pradesh, of 47 lakh acres planted with Bt cotton, 33.73 lakh acres suffered from crop failure. In other words, two-thirds of the cotton area had a yield loss of more than 50%. *The data from AP shows that after ten years of Bt Cultivation, the yields are less than the pre Bt days*

The graphs also show that in the last 4 years [since 2008], as Bt has risen from 67% to 92% of India’s cotton, yields have dropped steadily



In the face of these straight facts why did Mr Pawar choose to contradict his own ministry? Many people believe that Mr Pawar’s association with the multinational agro chemical industry is too close to comfort and he always chooses to stand by them whether it is on the issue of GE crops or FDI in food retail. Please do recall that in the entire Bt Brinjal moratorium issue he stood out like a sore thumb in the Indian Government.

Soil Health & Bt Cotton

Besides the yield problems Bt Cotton has been posing a great danger to the soil health. As far back as 2003, researchers of DDS who were studying Bt Cotton in Warangal, Nalgonda and Adilabad Districts of Andhra Pradesh reported increasing soil toxicity. In 2005, they had unequivocally held Bt cotton responsible for Rhytectomy, a root rot disease that makes entire cotton plants wilt away and also make other crops impossible to grow on those soils next season. Though this finding was poo-hooed by the agents of Bt Cotton industry, a later study by Dr Kranthi, the topmost cotton scientist in India and the Head of Central Institute for Cotton Research, Nagpur proves this point.

Dr Kranthi wrote : ***“Bt-cotton hybrids utilize more nutrients and water for higher yields and profits, therefore the soils are getting progressively depleted and need more nutrient recharging.”*** In other words what he was saying was, unless you use more fertilisers and water, Bt cotton will not yield more than the conventional cotton hybrids. He had observed a ***soil fatigue*** which is now seen as a major cause of Bt Cotton failure in places such as Vidarbha and the resultant suicides.

Afro Asian Conclave on Bt Cotton & Beyond

It is this Indian context of Bt Cotton which prompted the Southern Action on Genetic Engineering to hold an Afro Asian Conclave on Bt Cotton to find out if these experiences were peculiar to India or were there similar experiences elsewhere as well. The results are revealing. The politics being played by the multinational corporations in India is echoed from all parts of Africa and Asia.

In West Africa there is a concerted effort by the USAID and the AGRA initiative of the Bill and Melinda Foundation as well as by the biotech industry to usher in a New Green Revolution via Bt Cotton and other GE crops in the face of a stiff resistance offered by farmers and environmentalists. In the Philippines the resistance took the form of declaration of **GM Free regimes** by different island states and municipalities. But still the assault of GM Corn and pressure to grow Bt Eggplant on the national government continues to haunt the Philippines. Bangladesh faces the prospect of the introduction of GE Rice for the first time on this continent. Indonesia is perhaps the only country that has given a resounding slap on the face of biotech industry. They uprooted all the Bt Cotton plants grown in the Sulawesi region, burnt them and sent Monsanto packing home. The \$700,000 bribe offered by Monsanto to local authorities to permit them to continue to grow their cotton, the uncovering of this scandal by the US Department of Justice and subsequent fines of \$150,000 imposed on Monsanto is now a part of the folklore of scandals. All these are issues that the ***Afro Asian Conclave on Bt Cotton and Beyond*** has sought to explore by bringing in experiences from different parts of Asia and West Africa.

Today on the occasion of International GMO Opposition Day, we in the SAGE are proud to present you this extremely illustrative report of the **Afro Asian Conclave: Bt Cotton and Beyond**. We hope this adds to the already burgeoning knowledge on the dangers of GE in food and farming.



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