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Continuing Controversy in India over Mass Death of Sheep from Eating GE Cotton

BT cotton in yet another controversy

By Uma Sudhir

NDTV, June 1, 2006

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(Hyderabad): There is yet another controversy linked to the genetically modified Bt cotton plant and this time it is the alarming reports of sheep and goat taking ill, even dying after grazing on leftover Bt cotton fields.

This is what farmers and shepherds in Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh are saying.

The central government has reportedly ordered independent toxicology tests on Bt cotton leaves to ascertain the facts.

"They just became very dull and lifeless and died," said Pendala Venkatamma describing what happened to her sheep.

Earlier this year in February-March several villages in Warangal reported that sheep and goats were dying in unusually high numbers from a disease they did not recognise.

The only clue they had was that the animals grazed continuously on fields where Bt cotton had been grown.

"They were grazing on Bollguard cotton. In 4-5 days, they became dull, their stomach swelled up and they died," said Gantaiah, Shepherd.

Fact finding team

An independent fact-finding team that surveyed three random villages said animals that fed continuously on Bt cotton for up to a week became listless with erosive lesions in the mouth, nasal discharge and blackish diarrhea.

The mortality was as high as 25 per cent against the usual 5-10 per cent for this season.

<p>Genetic Engineering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ rBGH ▪ GE-Free Zones ▪ Millions Against Monsanto ▪ Cloning & Patenting ▪ Nanotechnology 	<p>"They took one or two sheep from the dead animals. Doctors conducted post-mortem but could not find viral, bacterial or fungal problem with that," said Ramprasad, scientist, Centre for Sustainable Agriculture.</p> <p>In Warangal, about 11 hectares was on cotton this year and 20 per cent of that officially on Bt cotton.</p> <p>But the unofficial figure puts that at upto 50 per cent. In January this year, following rains and some irrigation, there was fresh foliage but few bolls, so the fields were let out for grazing.</p>	<p>E N th A fe</p>
<p>Food Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mad Cow ▪ Irradiation ▪ Perchlorate 	<p>"Animals that have been grazing on non-Bt cotton also, shepherds are reporting that on such fields even if they grazed for 15 days, there was no problem reported. Whereas on Bt cotton, with 3-4 successive days of grazing, they started showing symptoms," said Kavita Kurungati, Researcher.</p>	<p>F A C</p>
<p>Fair Trade/Social Justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Buy Local Movement ▪ Protest Starbucks 	<p>When contacted, Monsanto, which has released Bt cotton commercially in India, said safety studies on goats, cows, buffaloes, chicken and fish have been conducted as part of the regulatory process to get Bollgard approved.</p>	<p>C C F C</p>
<p>Farm Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Honey Bees ▪ Supporting Local Farmers 	<p>"We conducted goat-feeding study with Bt cotton seed and found it to be safe," said Dr Vishwanathan, Industrial Toxicology Research Center, Lucknow.</p>	
<p>Politics & Democracy</p>	<p>Critics point out that there was no bio safety study on Bt cotton leaves, which is consumed by cattle during open grazing.</p>	
<p>OCA Action Center</p>		
<p>OCA Campaigns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planting Peace: No War No Warming ▪ SOS: Safeguard Organic Standards ▪ Breaking the Chains ▪ GE Free Zones ▪ Mad Cow USA ▪ Children's Environmental Health ▪ Coming Clean ▪ Millions Against Monsanto ▪ Clothes for a Change ▪ Protest Starbucks ▪ Nutri-Con 	<p>But Monsanto says Bt protein is present in miniscule amounts in cotton leaves and a goat has to eat over 24 tonnes of old leaves to reach the upper safe limit of 4300 mg/kg body weight of Cry 1Ac toxin present in the Bt plant.</p> <p>The company says the deaths could have been due to pesticide residues.</p> <p>Inquiry ordered</p> <p>The state government has ordered an investigation by the animal husbandry department.</p> <p>"We have immediately alerted animal husbandry dept to give us the details of villages where it has happened and what are their findings regarding this. We are certainly going to pursue further with the research institutes genetic research institutes, which can analyse the whole issue and yes, it is a cause of concern," said Poonam Malakondaiah, Agriculture Commissioner, Madhya Pradesh.</p>	
<p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Buying Guide ▪ OCA Web Forum ▪ OCA Press Center 	<p>Only a detailed scientific investigation may be able to establish whether at all there is a link between Bt cotton and the mortality in sheep and goat.</p> <p>Even otherwise it would be wise to go for much more comprehensive bio safety testing on Bt cotton but the whole range of genetically modified food crops that may soon be part of</p>	

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