

SAY NO

TO SUICIDE SEEDS

TERMINATOR TECHNOLOGY THREATENS FARMERS,
THE ENVIRONMENT AND FOOD SECURITY WORLDWIDE:

TAKE ACTION NOW



Issued on behalf of the UK Working Group on Terminator Technology

WHAT IS TERMINATOR TECHNOLOGY?



Multinational agribusiness companies, with the support of some governments, are trying a new PR strategy to make genetically modified (GM) crops acceptable.

They are presenting Terminator, a GM technology, as a means of stopping GM crops from contaminating non-GM crops. However, Terminator will not prevent contamination.

The real aim behind Terminator is to prevent farmers from saving seeds and thus increase the sales of agribusiness companies.

TERMINATOR TECHNOLOGY is the genetic modification of plants to make them produce sterile seeds. It is being developed by multinational agribusiness companies to prevent farmers from saving seeds to replant from one harvest to the next. If farmers have no choice but to buy new seeds every year, the companies are guaranteed large profits.

Farmers have warned that Terminator technology will threaten global food security (people's ability to grow or have access to food to eat) and could destroy traditional farming methods in much of the world. If the Terminator genes transfer into wild plant species and non-GM crops, it could also lead to irreversible environmental damage.

A *de facto* moratorium currently prevents further development of these 'suicide seeds' – a decision taken in 2000 by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that products incorporating Terminator technology should not be approved for field-testing or commercial use.

This moratorium is now under attack. Your help is needed now to push for a real ban on Terminator technology.

TERMINATOR TECHNOLOGY: WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

SIU/Still Pictures

DAMAGING TRADITIONAL FARMING METHODS AND KNOWLEDGE

Most farmers in developing countries do not buy seeds. Instead they save and share seeds from year to year – an age-old custom with the twin benefits that their seeds are adapted to local conditions and are free of charge.

Many of these farmers already struggle to afford basic necessities, and they will not be able to buy seed each year. Up to 1.4 billion small-scale farmers depend, as their main source of seeds, on seeds they save themselves or exchange with neighbours.

In most cultures and for most people, seeds are synonymous with life, fertility and growth. Terminator technology is in complete contradiction to these fundamental values.

“It’s a crime against humanity – they want to annihilate our seeds in order to force us under the yoke of industrial agriculture. We have to save our seeds.”

– Francisca Rodríguez, leader of Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas (rural and indigenous women’s network), Chile



Mauricio Ushina

UNDERMINING FOOD SECURITY

Terminator technology, like other GM technologies, threatens global food security in various ways. It undermines the traditional practice of saving seeds and could reduce the wide range of crops that is currently grown down to a handful of varieties. Moreover, the sterility genes could spread to other crops by a number of routes. This would reduce the number of seeds that grow, diminish the harvest, and thus destroy farmers’ livelihoods.

THREATENING CONTAMINATION

Promoters of Terminator technology claim that it will stop contamination of non-GM crops by GM crops. However, like any other GM genes, Terminator genes could spread to other crops by cross-fertilisation and by accidental mixing. So the GM Terminator genes will themselves contaminate non-GM crops.

The idea behind Terminator is that if the seeds resulting from this cross-fertilisation or accidental mixing are planted, they will not grow. However, because of the complexity of the Terminator technology, it is unlikely to be 100 per cent effective. This means that some of these seeds containing the GM Terminator genes will grow and thus GM contamination will be carried on into the next crop.

DENYING CONSUMER CHOICE

UK and European consumers have clearly shown that they do not want to eat GM food. If the CBD moratorium on Terminator technology is lifted seed companies will be able to introduce the GM Terminator genes in all their seeds, even the ones that are currently GM free, in order to increase their sales. This will increase the proportion of GM crops grown and make it increasingly difficult to guarantee that food and crops are GM-free.

UNKNOWN DANGERS

Genetic engineering has been shown to cause unplanned changes to the quality and functioning of crops. Terminator technology is no exception and like other GM crops can carry risks of:

- Introducing new, potentially allergenic, compounds to the food chain
- Changes in the crop’s nutritional qualities
- Unpredictable chemical changes in the plant
- Increased use of weed-killers and some other pesticides.

WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?



At present agribusinesses require farmers buying their seed to sign contracts that prevent them saving and replanting seeds. However, the enforcement of these contracts is costly and especially difficult in developing nations. Terminator is now being developed by agribusinesses to guarantee their sales of GM seeds year after year. It is a biological way to protect their patents on GM crops.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE is an approach to farming that meets environmental, economic, cultural and social needs, without damaging the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It depends on seed saving.

It emphasises crop diversity and rotation, favours small and medium-sized farms rather than large corporations, and prioritises the growing of staple crops, rather than cash crops for export.

If we are to help poor farmers in developing countries, we need to take a close look at the real causes of poverty. The unfair terms of global trade and the continuing burden of debt stop countries prospering. They force developing countries to prioritise the production of crops for export, over-exploit their natural resources, and neglect their most vulnerable people.

Poverty and hunger in the developing world cannot be solved by technological fixes like GM crops.



“This technology of sterile seeds will prevent us from implementing the Millennium Development Goal on hunger, and the poverty eradication action plan here in Uganda.”
– Food Rights Network (FORINET), Eastern Uganda

WHY ACT NOW?

SINCE 2000, biotechnology companies have been prevented from rushing ahead with Terminator by the CBD moratorium on the technology. The moratorium was agreed by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in response to the global alarm and outrage sparked by the granting of the first Terminator patent in the US in 1998.

But the moratorium is under attack from biotechnology companies and allied governments, who want to legalise Terminator technology. Meanwhile, corporations are pressing ahead with Terminator. Syngenta, Dupont, BASF, Monsanto and Delta and Pine Land (D&PL) are among the companies that have obtained patents for their versions of Terminator technology. On 5 October 2005, D&PL and the US Department of Agriculture were granted the first European patent on Terminator.

Several international meetings of the CBD in 2006 offer a chance to strengthen the CBD moratorium on Terminator technology. Corporations will be lobbying hard to get it overturned. Public pressure is needed to make sure they don't succeed.



Different types of maize: crop diversity is under threat from agribusiness companies promoting GM technology.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

PLEASE WRITE TO YOUR MP, asking him or her to sign a parliamentary motion, EDM 1300, to show support for a ban on Terminator.

Remember, although the issue will continue to be relevant throughout 2006, the all-important meeting of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity is in March 2006 – so please send your letter by 1 March 2006. You can use the following text, or explain your concerns about Terminator in your own words:

Dear _____

I am deeply concerned that Terminator technology is being actively developed and promoted by corporations and that the United Nations' *de facto* moratorium is under threat. I am asking you to act on my behalf to ensure that Terminator seeds will never be approved for use anywhere.

Terminator technology threatens farmers' livelihoods, biodiversity and consumer rights globally, and undermines food security – particularly in developing countries.

I urge you to sign EDM 1300, 'Terminator Technology'. The 8th conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will be held in March 2006. Please work to ensure that, at this conference, the UK government continues to support the existing decision not to allow testing or commercialisation of Terminator technology.

Yours sincerely,



To contact your MP visit www.locata.co.uk/commons/ or phone the House of Commons Information Service on 020 7219 4272.

If you would like to do more to oppose Terminator technology, please also write to:

- Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR
- Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for International Development, 1 Palace Street, London SW1E 5HE

WHERE CAN YOU FIND OUT MORE?

- Visit the website of the international Ban Terminator campaign www.banterminator.org for the latest news on Terminator technology.
- If you would like more (free) copies of this leaflet to distribute through your networks, please e-mail environment@progressio.org.uk or write to Environmental Action at the address below. The leaflet is also available to download from Progressio's environment website www.eco-matters.org



If you are concerned about the potential impacts of Terminator technology and GM seeds, please make sure that your MP and other elected representatives remain aware of your opposition to Terminator technology.



Published January 2006 on behalf of the UK Working Group on Terminator Technology by:

Progressio, Unit 3, Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road, London N1 7BJ

Tel: +44 (0)20 7354 0883; Fax: +44 (0)20 7359 0017; Email: enquiries@progressio.org.uk; Website: www.progressio.org.uk

Progressio is the working name of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, charity reg no 294329, company reg no 2002500

In endorsing this statement, each organisation is indicating its formal agreement in those areas where it has specific competence. Each endorses the overall argument of the statement as a whole and each recognises the expertise and authority of the other member organisations in those areas where they themselves do not have specific competence.