

TERMINATOR SEEDS AT COP8 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What is Terminator Technology?

Terminator technology refers to plants that have been genetically modified to render sterile seeds at harvest. It is one of a class of GM technologies known as Genetic Use Restriction Technology (or GURTS) that allow genetic traits to be switched on and off via application of an external inducer such as a chemical. The United Nations refers to sterile seed technologies as Varietal-GURTS (or V-GURTS).

Who has developed Terminator Technology?

Terminator technology was developed by the multinational seed/agrochemical industry and the US government to prevent farmers from saving and re-planting harvested seed and to maximize seed industry profits. The US Department of Agriculture and Delta & Pine Land, the world's 11th largest seed company, jointly hold three patents on Terminator technology. Delta & Pine Land are currently testing the technology in greenhouses and a representative is now travelling worldwide to promote his company's Terminator technology. Syngenta, DuPont, BASF and Monsanto also hold patents on Terminator technology.

Who are the stakeholders?

- **Small-scale farmers** face the biggest threats from Terminator seeds as their ability to grow and improve crops depends on selecting and saving seeds from year to year. Over 1.4 billion people in the world depend on farm-saved seed as their primary seed source. The dynamic exchange of seeds between communities and peoples is threatened by sterile seed technologies.
- For many **local communities and Indigenous peoples**, seed saving is connected with traditional knowledge relating to agricultural biodiversity and deeply held and long practiced cultural and spiritual traditions, all of which are threatened by Terminator.
- **Environmental action groups** also take issue with Terminator seeds, since Terminator seeds threaten agricultural biodiversity and pose new biosafety risks. In the first generation, pollen from Terminator plants can travel and cross with wild relatives or neighbouring crops resulting in plants with sterile seeds.

- **The seed and biotechnology industry** wants Terminator in order to protect corporate patents over seeds, particularly genetically modified seeds, and to force farmers to buy commercial seed each season.
- **Most governments** have spoken up against Terminator and in defence of the farmers in their countries. There are only a few rich governments that are promoting Terminator – namely Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain – with the United States.

Terminator's potential impacts include:

- dependency on commercial seeds
- displacing traditional, Indigenous, or local ecological knowledge and cultural and spiritual practices
- disrupting traditional seed exchange practices
- irreversible changes to ecosystems from contamination with Terminator genes
- yield loss due to cross-pollination by Terminator plants
- reduced agricultural biodiversity

What is the status of Terminator technology?

- In 2000, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity adopted language that created an international *de facto* moratorium on Terminator seeds, recommending that governments neither field-test nor commercialize genetic seed sterilization technologies (Decision V/5, Section III, paragraph 23).
- Terminator has not yet been commercialized or field-tested — although trials are currently being conducted in greenhouses in the US.
- The moratorium is being undermined by newly proposed language of “case by case risk assessment” of Terminator. The language was pushed forward at a meeting of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Granada, Spain in January 2006 by the Australian government, with support from the US, Canada and New Zealand. This new language echoes Monsanto's own reference to looking at Terminator on a “case by case” basis.

“Case by case risk assessment” generally focuses on a narrow, science-based risk assessment that does not consider the potential socio-economic impacts of new technologies. The goal of the case-by-case approach is to see Terminator crops regulated like any other genetically modified plant.

Terminator at the CBD COP8

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity’s 8th Conference of the Parties will determine the future of the *de facto* moratorium on Terminator technology. Terminator is expected to be raised in the agenda during the second day (Tuesday 21st March). The Ban Terminator campaign will be providing daily news updates from Curitiba during the meeting of the CBD – see http://www.banterminator.org/news_updates and also at www.etcblog.org

The Ban Terminator Campaign

The International Ban Terminator Campaign was formed in May 2005 by civil society groups and movements in response to the threats posed by Terminator and the new corporate promotion of the technology. The Ban Terminator Campaign seeks to promote government bans on Terminator technology at the national and international levels, and supports the efforts of civil society, farmers, Indigenous peoples and social movements to campaign against it. The Campaign is supported by groups and movements across the world including AS-PTA (Assessoria e Serviços a Projectos em Agricultura Alternativa), ETC Group, GRAIN, Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism, ITDG (Intermediate Technology Development Group), Pesticide Action Network – Asia and the Pacific, Third World Network, Via Campesina.

Ban Terminator Campaign www.banterminator.org

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