



Memo n°14 - Krishan Bir Chaudhary
Farmer, INDIA

The Hague, October 15th-16th, 2016

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Dr Krishan Bir Chaudhary is a farmer leader, who through decades of work has fought for the rights of small farmers and farm workers. He has vehemently opposed GM technology. Travelling all over India to spread awareness about the dangers of GMOs, Dr Chaudhary is responsible for strengthening the voice against corporatization of India's farms and farmers. Being at a policy making level, he has fought to implement pro-farmers policies and often debated and contested on public forums the industrial farming propaganda and successfully advocated with the ruling parties to ensure the farmers rights are conserved.

Known for his anti-globalisation views, he has been an active participant at the WTO protests at Geneva, Hong Kong, Bali, and more recently Nairobi. He is often spoken out about the losses incurred by Indian farmers because of the globalization and liberalizations of Indian.

Video:https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=6&v=kr6y6piId7A

Biography.

- President of Bharatiya Krishak Samaj (one of the largest Indian farmers' organization)

- Former Chairman of State Farms Corporation of India (Government of India undertaking) now merged in National Seed Corporation.
- Former Chairman of Indian Sugarcane Development Council (Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India)
- Former Director of National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation (NAFED),
- Founder-member of Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India)
- Member of many Parliament Standing Committees on all farmer's issues.
- Has held several other positions in the government bodies and other public forum on farmers' welfare,
- Participated in ministerial meetings of World Trade Organization,
- Author of Development Misplaced,
- Editor of monthly magazine Kisan Ki Awaaz (Voice of Farmers)
- He has been instrumental in promotion of farmers' effective participation in policy formulation and advocacy.
- A well known writer and often invited on Indian national television channels such as Lok Sabha TV, Rajya Sabha TV, DD Kisan, India 24x7, News Nation, ZEE T.V., Aaj Tak, NDTV, All India Radio, and others to address farmers and rural issues.

India's farming crisis

The distress of farmers in India can be traced back to the introduction of technology-led, capital intensive farming in the heyday of the Green Revolution. With the advent of 'economic liberalisation' and the globalisation of trade, this distress has been aggravated. Unfair rules of the multilateral global trading regime have depressed global and domestic prices, and denied Indian farmers adequate remunerative prices. The poor farmer is squeezed between high input costs and low returns. Credit obtained from formal or informal banking systems is unable to bail him out of this precarious situation. Caught in a vicious debt trap, many farmers have resorted to suicide.

BT cotton and the debt trap

Misled and misguided, the changeover to Bt cotton proved to be a total failure, causing severe losses for our cotton growers. The enormous loss and the resultant debt trap forced thousands of cotton growers to commit suicide. Bt cotton proved to be a total fiasco. Thousands and thousands of farmers have already committed suicide, and there seems to be no end to this tragic situation. Trends in suicide remain unabated even now, especially among cotton growers.

Significantly, farmer suicide is reported mainly from the high-tech agriculture belts, such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Punjab. All these states have embraced capital intensive and 'cutting edge' technology in the name of boosting production. In areas where traditional agricultural practices and organic farming are prevalent, such as Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, suicide is unheard of.

The ripple effect

As far as agriculture is concerned, it is alarming that India is moving towards a point of no return. From being a self-reliant nation of food surplus, the country is becoming a net importer of food. In this context, policies to promote contract and corporate farming, the use of genetically modified seeds such as Bt cotton, and genetic synthesis in aquaculture and industrial poultry farming, threaten to undermine food security and the livelihoods of poor farmers.

There are authenticated reports that alarmingly high numbers of cattle have died from grazing on Bt cotton residues in fodder. And, the Government of India's Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), under the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, is baffled at the news of sheep mortality, on account of grazing in the Bt cotton

fields in Warangal district in Andhra Pradesh. The GEAC has already admitted that toxicity studies on Bt cotton leaves have not yet been conducted, and although it has now asked the department of biotechnology to conduct studies, the lukewarm attitude of GEAC to ascertain the level of Bt toxin responsible for killing livestock is highly questionable.

Whose trade organisation?

The production of transgenes through genetic manipulation is bad science, unethical, and totally against the natural order that is responsible for the evolution and sustainability of life. It is fraught with the danger of genetic pollution and contamination, the destruction of ecosystems, environmental degradation and DNA deviations. The regimes of the WTO promote technology-driven, high-cost farming, and encourage the corporate monopolisation of the sector. This mainly serves to promote the interests of agri-business multinationals at the expense of small and marginal farmers in developing countries. With the interests of agri-business pre-eminent, all efforts to reduce agricultural subsidies in developed countries are being stonewalled.

The link with trade liberalisation

The impact of liberalisation on agriculture is best illustrated by India's experience in the oil seed sector. The liberalisation of heavily subsidised edible oil imports led to the decline in oil seed prices in India, financially ruining oil seed growers in the country. This totally negates previous efforts to make India almost self-sufficient in the oil seed sector by 1998. Now, almost 50 per cent of edible oil is imported, resulting in annual spending of \$1,800 million in foreign exchange.

Inept, amateurish and mediocre handling of our priorities is to blame for this ugly situation. The Government is playing a faulty game of cash crops over food crops, and promotion of corporate farming at the cost of traditional agro-rural systems, especially in the dry and arid zones of the country. Such policies will further add to displacement and migration to urban areas. Blind trade liberalisation and a market driven economy will throw the country into a cobweb of trans-national corporations. Importing oil seed is only the tip of the iceberg; it is a prelude to the beginning of the end of Indian agro-systems and their ultimate take-over by multinational corporations.

Distorting, or not distorting...

Heavy subsidies given to the farming sector in developing countries are basically responsible for dismantling India's agro-system, making it economically unrewarding.

Some 'trade experts' and negotiators in the developed world try to justify their misdeeds by putting subsidies into categories: "trade-distorting" and "non trade-distorting." But all subsidies are distorting, and India needs to be emphatic about their removal in developed countries, where commitments to reduce subsidies have not been fulfilled. Instead, subsidies have been increasing, making it more difficult for developing countries to compete in the world market.

The World Bank and the IMF have become instruments in pressurising developing countries to open up their markets. The core motive of the WTO is to promote the interest of agri-business and multinationals at the expense of small, marginal and family farms across the world. It is imperative that developing countries are given the option to apply quantitative restrictions on imports, whenever needed, to protect the livelihoods of poor farmers and agricultural workers. India should not tolerate the obstinate and irrational attitude of developed countries, which caused the collapse of WTO negotiations. Government should remain determined in all future negotiations to focus primarily on the interests of small and marginal farmers. Agriculture is not only for trade; it is a way of life.

Dr Chaudhary's recent interview

The Citizen's speaks to Dr. Krishan Bir Chaudhary

TC: Why did seed companies such as Monsanto and Bayer split from the National Seed Association of India? What happened?

KBC: First we must understand that companies such as Monsanto have looted Rs 5000 crore from the Indian farmers through a system of illegal royalties collections. Their claims of higher yields, pest control and more income for the farmers have also been debased. Bollgard 1 and Bollgard 2 have already become redundant as the bollworm have evolved and developed resistance to them. Monsanto's lie of Bt Cotton and Bayer ineffective pesticide "Oberon" has costed Punjab Rs 70000 crore and loss of 2/3rd of Bt cotton in 2015 October. While the input costs to the cotton farmers have increased by 6 times, the yields are only up by 3%. Bt cotton has failed everywhere.

In the meeting, I raised objection on the issue of royalties for as per the Indian constitution (Plant Varieties Protection and Farmers' Rights Act) does not allow patents on seeds and plants.

The royalty taken by Monsanto is illegal under Indian law. We asked the government and the Parliamentary standing Committee on Agriculture to control the price of seeds, as they are an essential to the rural economy. I strongly support the government's decision to regulate the price of the Bt cotton seeds under the Essential Commodities Act and even further have asked the government for the formation of a new authority to regulate and balance out the price of seeds.

I had only asked the NSAI to respect Indian laws and act in the interest of the Indian farmers,

But the seed companies such as Monsanto, Dupont Pioneer, Syngenta, et al found this to be objectionable. They along with a few others have formed a so-called "Federation" and this group of international racketeers, want to control the food security of India. India has a large population and to feed our country we need seeds, by controlling the seeds they want to create a new "Seed Raj".

I urged the NSAI to not only shun the illegal royalty collection but to demand compensation from Monsanto for its failed technology to be given to the widows and next-of-kin of cotton farmers that have committed suicide due to Monsanto's Bt cotton.

I also raised the issue of GM mustard and said that why praise GM mustard when Indian varieties such as RH-749, Rohini, Urvashi, et al produce about 30 quintals per hectare against the 25 quintal claim of GM mustard ?

I have requested the panel and am working to get "white papers" out in the Parliament so that India can know which all official, scientists, bureaucrats, media persons and so called "farmers' leaders" are in the pockets of Monsanto. Monsanto over a decade now has been manipulating India's laws by putting influential people on its payroll paying them with foreign trips, etc.

TC: First the Pharma companies and now the seeds companies spilt away, do we see a pattern and what effect will it have on the Indian farmers?

KBC: Yes, there is a pattern here, and it is one that will create a monopoly in the market of these companies. Just compare the prices of essential medicines used to treat cancer, diabetes, et al. The salts that cost only Rs 5 to make are being sold at Rs 50 by these

companies. Review the price of 'stents' used in heart surgery in the US and in India with their actual production costs and you will know, about their exploitative practices.

They are also attacking the generic medicines companies for patent violations. We cannot allow health of India's poor to be manipulated by the MNCs. The poor also have the right to a life and essential medicines should be made available at affordable prices to every Indian.

The seed companies have created monopolies all over the world and are cheating farmers' world over. We cannot let that happen in India. The Public sector along with the government should join hands to protect Indian farmers' right to seed and seed sovereignty.

Indian farmers' right to grow, breed, exchange and sell seeds is a basic right.

TC: At the FSII press conference, Sharad Khurana, Country Manager DuPont Pioneer said, "Forceful licensing stifles innovation. Nobody would want to invest," could this be a threat/challenge to PM Modi's 'Make in India' scheme especially that John Kerry is in India now?

KBC: It is a planned and pre-meditated statement made by the Seed corporations only because John Kerry is visiting India. They are misguiding Indians as the issue is not about licensing, it is about illegal royalties and transgression of Indian laws. The Indian constitution does not allow patents on seeds and plants. They are making futile attempts to put pressure on the Indian government to bow to the illegal demands of Monsanto. But I will like to remind them that India had one of the largest R&D public sector. It has collapsed only because of the GM propaganda and the manipulation of government by companies such as Monsanto. If today India is importing pulses and edible oils and oilseeds it is because of the policies of the last government.

And as for the threat/challenge we are not bothered, India is a country of strong character. We will defend our people and farmers and stay strong.

TC: While the Competition Commission of India (CCI) India's Anti-trust/monopoly regulator is probing Mahyco-Monsanto for "unfair business practices" FSII has asked for "market governed seed prices". What should we make of this "Free trade" or "Seed Raj"?

KBC: Let me first make it clear that Monsanto already has an unfair market monopoly as 95% of Bt cotton seed is the "property" of Monsanto. They are the only market! and have been so for a decade now. Until now Monsanto freely decided the trait and royalty fees with no bars. This has resulted in over 300,000 farmers committing suicide in the last

twenty years most of which have happened in the Bt cotton areas. In my opinion, Seed is an essential commodity and should be regulated under the Essential Commodities Act. Indian Farmers have paid enough with their sweat and blood for Monsanto's market profits. It is time, the government acts and to end this Seed Raj of Monsanto. We have requested the NSAI and parliament for the same and the NSAI agrees with us and is working to "end seed monopolies".

TC: What is the future of seed in India?

KBC: Our R&D have picked up and should be working more efficiently especially to make improvements in our native varieties to make them more productive. The government Soil health card and irrigation schemes will also bolster agricultural productivity. Then there is strong push to promote natural farming in India. In fact, the plan for Organic Himalaya has been announced.

Plus the government is planning to convert 1 lakh villages to natural farming as the chemical-industrial model of agriculture has destroyed the Indians small farms.

We cannot adopt the industrial model of agriculture practised in countries such as USA, because 85% of Indian farmers have land holdings below 2 acres. Large farms like in the US, means death and unemployment of millions of Indians, we cannot afford that.

Plus Indian also cannot afford to give huge subsidies like the US to its chemical-industrial farmers. India cannot have such a large farm bill as the USA does.

We Indian should understand the situation in our country and strive for sovereignty in food and seed and not blindly accept unscientific and failed technologies of promoted by Industrial agriculture.