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Asia Press Office, Right Livelihood Award Foundation

Laureates Decry Golden Rice and GM bananas as “False Miracles”

With “Food Safety” being the theme for this years’ World Health Day, 39 Laureates of the Right Livelihood Award from across the world have endorsed a declaration on the future of nutrition, denouncing Golden Rice and GM Bananas as “false miracles”.

On 8 March 2015, Vandana Shiva, 1993 Right Livelihood Award Laureate, and her organisation Navdanya, along with a coalition of women’s groups in India, began to call for signatures to a declaration on the future of nutrition. The coalition exposed the “false” claims of international corporations alleging the superiority of genetically engineered crops like Golden Rice and GM Bananas, and called on women around the globe to instead protect the soil, biodiversity, subsistence of farmers, and health of the people.

As many as 39 Right Livelihood Award Laureates have since endorsed this declaration ([link to signatories appended below](#)), adding support for the global movement against Golden Rice and GM Bananas. The declaration asks the world to reject “false promises” and instead promote a sustainable agro-ecology system with crop diversity and seed sovereignty.

GRAIN Endorses Declaration

Another Right Livelihood Award Laureate, GRAIN, as part of STOP Golden Rice Alliance, issued a release along similar lines on 10 March 2015 ([accessible here](#)).

GRAIN has since also endorsed the Vandana Shiva initiated declaration, emphasising that Golden Rice is not the answer to vitamin deficiencies in developing countries. GRAIN’s release stated the following:

“Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) – like other problems on malnutrition and hunger – is not caused by the lack of Vitamin A in food, but by people’s inability to access a balanced diet. Industrial monocultures farming system has led to unbalanced patterns of food production around the world. Variety and diversifying food is the key to solving vitamin deficiency. With inexpensive Vitamin A source abundantly available from various natural biodiversity, produced by small scale and backyard producers, it is a mistake to turn blindly to Golden Rice, a crop that has not yet determined if it can actually improve the vitamin A intake. The development of Golden Rice merely serves the biotech industry in its efforts to win wider approval for GM foods. It is a tool to promote GMOs that would pave the way towards control of food and agriculture by agrobiotech corporations.”

Summary of Declaration

Corporations are proposing genetically engineered Golden Rice and GMO Bananas as a solution to hunger and malnutrition in the Global South. The

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declaration initiated by Right Livelihood Laureate Vandana Shiva criticises the claims of nutrition benefits:

“Golden Rice is 350% less efficient in providing Vit A than the biodiversity alternatives that women grow. GMO ‘iron-rich’ Bananas have 3000% less iron than turmeric and 2000% less iron than amchur (mango powder)... Apart from being nutritionally empty, GMOs are part of an industrial system of agriculture that is destroying the planet, depleting our water sources, increasing green houses gases, and driving farmers into debt and suicide through a greater dependence on chemical inputs. Moreover, these corporate-led industrial monocultures are destroying biodiversity, and we are losing access to the food systems that have sustained us throughout time. When we consider the number of patents involved in these initiatives, it becomes all too clear that the only beneficiaries of these supposedly ‘people-led’ ventures are large companies operating for profit - not for people.”

The declaration explains **six processes through which industrial farming robs food of its nutrition.**

First, industrial breeding is based on uniformity, long distance transport, and industrial processing, and not on diversity, taste, nutrition, quality and resilience. Industrially bred wheat varieties are low in nutrition and have contributed to the epidemic of gluten intolerance.

Second, by replacing biodiversity with monocultures, industrial agriculture reduces the amount of nutrition per acre.

Third, by renewing fertility with chemical inputs of synthetic fertilisers, the health of the soil is destroyed, nutrition in soils is reduced, and plants become nutritionally empty.

Fourth, GMOs are leading to a decline in nutritional availability, because the biotechnology industry is growing commodities, not food. 90% of the GMO corn and soya goes to biofuel and animal food, not human food.

Fifth, herbicide tolerant crops account for most of the GMOs cultivated. The use of Roundup (glyphosate) with Roundup Ready crops removes vital minerals like manganese through “chelation”-binding.

Sixth, there is ecology of biodiversity in our nutrition. Nutrients need each other. Fats are needed for absorption and bioavailability of Vitamin A, and Vitamin C is needed for absorption of iron. Mechanistic reductionism in nutrition undermines the ecological processes through which farms grow nutrition and our bodies are nourished.

Golden Rice & GM bananas are False Miracles

Golden Rice is genetically engineered rice with two genes from a daffodil and one gene from a bacterium. It is being offered as a “miracle cure” for Vitamin A Deficiency (VAD). But Golden Rice “is 350% less efficient in providing Vit A than the biodiversity alternatives that women have to offer.”

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Furthermore, “Not only do these indigenous alternatives based on women’s knowledge provide more Vit A than Golden Rice at a lower cost, they also provide other nutrients. One such example is iron, which helps fight iron deficiency and anaemia. But just like the biotechnology industry is offering Golden Rice for Vit A deficiency, it is promoting GMO bananas for increased Vit A and iron. In reality, GMO bananas provide 7000% less iron than indigenous biodiversity that Indian women are experts in growing and processing.”

Further Negative Effects of Golden Rice & GM Bananas

The declaration also touches upon the **unethical and illegal feeding trials** for Golden Rice as well as the GM Bananas. It links the monoculture rice diet to the diabetes epidemic. With 62 million patients, India already has extremely high rates of diabetes. “Golden Rice is an irresponsible proposal that would intensify this by blocking much-needed alternatives - biodiversity and balance in our diets.”

Golden Rice promotes **monocultures**, which further destroy biodiversity. Golden Rice will increase the **use of synthetic nitrogen fertilisers**. The declaration states: “India is already one of the largest importers of nitrogen fertilisers, and Golden Rice will only serve to increase this. Moreover, it will increase the use of water, intensifying the water crisis. It will contribute to climate change through increased green house gas emissions. And it will leave our farmers liable to higher input costs through dependence on chemicals and fees for proprietary technologies.”

The declaration also mentions close links between the scientists involved and the biotechnology corporations pushing royalty collection through patents.

“As a source of nutrition for the Global South, Golden Rice has no real benefits. But considering the precedents set by soya, corn, canola and cotton, introducing Golden Rice as a way for large companies to gain control over entire food cultures based on rice, makes perfect sense” states the declaration, in conclusion.

Read the full Declaration:

<http://seedfreedom.info/campaign/declaration-for-international-womens-day-8-march-2015/>

List of Signatures to the Declaration:

www.rightlivelihood.org/biodiversity_gmo.html

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