Five reasons why seed diversity is good

When farmers plant a variety of seeds in their field they are thought of as backward by agribusiness corporations which maintain that genetically modified (GM) and hybrid varieties are the future of farming. Yet through millennia of traditional seed breeding, humans have developed thousands of different varieties for food crops across the world. Seed diversity allows farmers control over their food system, protects biodiversity and builds resilience against climate change.

Here are the reasons why seed diversity is good:

• Maintaining a diversity of plant varieties helps ensure that a large range of genetic traits in our food. This in turn helps farmers adapt their crops to provide protection from disease and changes in the climate.

• Open pollinated seeds are locally adapted and access to them is generally free from corporate control. Farmers are able to save, develop, share and sell these seeds through local markets and informal trade networks. Farmers can also get good income from breeding and selling seeds.

• Seed diversity helps protect large scale crop failure from blights and disease. Commercial seeds tend to encourage monocropping, a practice that makes a farmers crop particularly vulnerable to disease.

• Growing a diverse number of plants gives farmers the ability to harvest food at different times throughout the year. Wild plants and minor crop species provide healthy food during staple crop (like maize and wheat) shortages.

• A study in Malawi showed that when there is more farm production diversity, there is also more dietary diversity – a key indicator of health and nutrition. Managing seed diversity is an important way of maintaining cultural diversity. Communities growing a range of different plant varieties are able to celebrate the range of tastes in their cooking.

Take action

To find out the latest news and updates from our agribusiness campaign visit www.globaljustice.org.uk/food or call 020 7820 4900.

Global Justice Now campaigns for a world where resources are controlled by the many, not the few, and works in solidarity with social movements to fight injustice. We used to be the World Development Movement.

Global Justice Now, 66 Offley Road, London SW9 0LS
t: 020 7820 4900  e: offleyroad@globaljustice.org.uk  w: www.globaljustice.org.uk
Five problems with corporate seeds

February 2015

Here are five reasons why commercial seeds are bad:

- Hybrid seeds often produce higher yields when first planted, but the second generation seeds will produce low yields and unpredictable crop traits, making them unsuitable for saving and storing. This means that instead of saving seeds from their own crops, farmers who use hybrid seeds become completely dependent on the seed companies that sell them.

- Seeds companies are being backed by new laws that protect their profits at the expense of farmers. New patenting laws being implemented around the world mean that farmers are now risking fines or even imprisonment if they use a company’s seeds without permission.

- GM seeds are designed to be used in concert with expensive chemical inputs, this leads to increased pesticide and herbicide use in the long-term, which damages the environment, causes health problems, and leads poorer farmers into spiralling debt.

- Farmers who buy commercial seeds are usually tied in to contracts that commit them to buying seeds, fertiliser and pesticides packages, and are unable to save or trade the seeds they have grown.

- The increasing corporate control of seeds decreases the biodiversity of crops that farmers have access to. This threatens their ability to breed crops according to their changing needs and environmental changes such as climate change. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that 75 per cent of crop diversity has already been lost between 1900 and 2000.

Big agribusiness corporations such as Monsanto maintain that commercial seeds, like hybrid and genetically modified (GM) seeds are the solution to world hunger. They argue that these seeds deal with the increasing challenges brought about by climate change and degradation, desertification and declining soil fertility. However this is a myth.

Maize seeds roll off the conveyor belt

Take action

To find out the latest news and updates from our agribusiness campaign visit www.globaljustice.org.uk/food or call 020 7820 4900.

Global Justice Now campaigns for a world where resources are controlled by the many, not the few, and works in solidarity with social movements to fight injustice. We used to be the World Development Movement.

Global Justice Now, 66 Offley Road, London SW9 0LS
t: 020 7820 4900 e: offleyroad@globaljustice.org.uk w: www.globaljustice.org.uk