



biowatch

SOUTH AFRICA

bulletin

MAY 2013

biodiversity | food sovereignty | biosafety | social justice

Could African farmers lose the right to their seed?

Seed and the control of seed lies at the heart of agriculture and food security. In Africa, 80% of seed comes from local and community saved seed resources.

This entire African traditional system is under threat from multinational companies such as Monsanto and Pioneer which are involved in promoting hybrid and genetically modified seed. Under the guise of "assisting the development of African agriculture", these corporations are pushing to control the African seed system.

They are calling for uniform adherence to the strict 1991 Act of the International Union for the Protection of Plant Varieties (UPOV), across the board, for Africa. Because of the stringency of UPOV, the real impact of this will be the loss of control of the seed supply by indigenous small-holder farmers. Writes Glenn Ashton in an article for the South African Civil Society Information Service (sacsis.org.za): "What is at play here is a direct conflict between peasant farmers' networks and the neo-colonial attempt to subvert African agriculture by restrictive, first world regulation."

Biowatch is keeping a close eye on this important issue and will keep you updated.

World Marches Against Monsanto

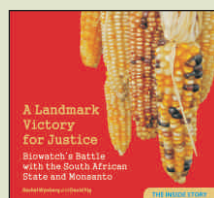
On Saturday, 25 May 2013, people around the world will unite against multinational Monsanto and raise awareness of the hazards of GMOs and the corporate control of our seeds and food.



The global **March Against Monsanto** will take place in over 36 countries. To find out what events are happening in your area (marches, film screenings, workshops, exhibitions) on and leading up to 25 May, go to www.march-against-monsanto.com



We launch our much-anticipated book in Cape Town, Durban and in Johannesburg at the Constitutional



Court. Order printed copies, or download an electronic version. See page 3

Biowatch farmers visit Gauteng to share their learnings and traditional seeds, and to inspire



farmers from agricultural projects in Ivory Park. See page 3

Biowatch farmers from Tshaneni, KwaHhohho, KwaNgwanase, Ingwavuma and Pongola are



adding value to their produce by learning how to make preserves. See page 4

From the director

We have been participating in some interesting and important processes: the African Women's Development Fund workshop on Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods; the Southern African Food Lab and PLAAS Learning journey into small-holder farmer support; and a consultative process run by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries on the draft national agro-ecology strategy (now in its 7th draft). It is clear that there is increasing support for small-holder development. However, more attention and energy must be given to challenging industrial agriculture and the industrial food system.

We welcomed the decision by the Competition Appeal Court (CAC) to grant the Competition Commission (CC) leave to appeal a cost order at the Constitutional Court. The order related to the merger between US multinational Pioneer Hi-Bred and Pannar, South Africa's last major seed company, a process that has been tracked in previous newsletters. The costs award was reminiscent of the Biowatch case (read the recently published *A Landmark Victory for Justice: Biowatch's Battle with the South African State and Monsanto*).

We have also had several learning exchanges, where we've learnt much from other partners – and have hopefully contributed much too!

At the community project level, there have been many activities, several of which are described in this newsletter.

Also, we recently moved office, co-incidentally happening at the same time as celebratory events for the launch of our much-anticipated book in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban! We look forward to welcoming you to the new Biowatch office (details below).

Rose Williams

Biowatch Durban office:

222 Evans Road, Glenwood, Durban 4001
Telephone: 031 206 2954
E-mail: biowatch@mweb.co.za
Web: www.biowatch.org.za

Biowatch Mtubatuba office:

Oriole Centre, Jan Smuts Avenue, Mtubatuba 3935
Telephone: 035 550 3148 | 074 688 7854
E-mail: bwsakzn@mweb.co.za

GM update:

Monsanto exploiting loopholes in EU law

Multinational biotech companies are gaining more control over the source of our food by patenting varieties of everyday vegetables and fruits like cucumber, broccoli and melons. Companies like Monsanto have found loopholes in European law to claim exclusive rights over conventional seeds. Once a patent exists in one country, trade agreements and negotiations often push other countries, like South Africa, to honour it as well.

Biosafety Bill threat in Uganda

The National Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill being discussed before the Ugandan parliamentary committee on science and technology lacks the necessary safeguards to protect the interests of farmers and favours multinational companies. In 2003, Uganda ratified the Cartagena Protocol which mandates all parties to ensure an adequate level of protection in the field of safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms resulting from biotechnology. However, the proposed Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill is intended to facilitate massive introduction of GM crops in Uganda while ignoring the potential risks and the need for a precautionary approach. For more information go to www.newvision.co.ug/news/641949-biosafety-bill-detrimental-to-farmers.html.

SA labelling regulations under review

The regulations relating to GM food are currently under review, but this does not mean that industry no longer needs to label food containing 5% or more of GM crop substances – such food *must* have a label clearly stating “contains Genetically Modified Organisms”.

US public rejects legalisation of GE trees

In an initial round of comment on proposed legislation, the US public overwhelmingly rejected a petition by genetically engineered (GE) tree company ArborGen to commercially sell their GE freeze-tolerant eucalyptus trees. ArborGen hopes to sell billions of GE cold-tolerant eucalyptus trees for planting across millions of acres in the US South in vast industrial plantations. According to Timberwatch, ArborGen has a long-standing love-affair with FABI (Biotechnology Institute, University of Pretoria), which is heavily sponsored by the South African timber industry. There is little doubt that should ArborGen succeed with its deregulation petition in the US, there will be a similar push to let their “frankentrees” loose on African high altitude grasslands.



Celebrating at book launches in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban



TOP (left to right): Biowatch Board members and staff at the Constitutional Court; Rachel Wynberg, co-author; Advocate Gilbert Marcus SC; Dale McKinley, Right2Know Campaign. BOTTOM (left to right): Janet Love, Director of the Legal Resources Center and Advocate Richard Moultrie; David Fig, co-author, with Judge Justice Poswa; Nompilo Mkhabela and Sphiwe Dlamini, Biowatch community facilitators, with Hlengiwe Mthimkhulu, Director of Zisize Educational Trust.

A victory for justice ...

Biowatch recently launched its much-anticipated book, *A Landmark Victory for Justice: Biowatch's Battle with the South African State and Monsanto*, in Cape Town, Durban and at the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg.

Written by Rachel Wynberg and David Fig, Biowatch founder trustees, the book tells the inside story of how a reasonable request for access to GMO permit applications catapulted Biowatch into almost a decade of litigation against the South African state and Monsanto – a battle that was finally won in the Constitutional Court.

Said David Fig, co-author, "The book is saying: let's celebrate this victory together, let's understand more about what happened, let's learn the lessons and let's pass the lessons on, not only to future generations but to other organisations that may be facing the same kinds of battles over access to information, over sustainable approaches to agriculture, battles over land and water. Everyone can learn from what we went through."



Available in major bookstores or directly from Biowatch at www.biowatch.org.za

An electronic version can be downloaded free of charge.



The Cooperative and Policy Alternative Center (COPAC) recently invited Biowatch to present at a monthly forum meeting held by the Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Cooperative (SEECC). Supported by COPAC, SEECC has initiated agricultural projects in Ivory Park to foster food sovereignty.

After asking people to name all the food plants they grew, the Biowatch farmers produced some of their own seed. Excitement mounted as the seeds were passed around and participants tried to identify them. Many people were unfamiliar with these traditional crops although elders recalled these foods and shared their own traditional names and ways of growing and cooking them.



Biowatch farmers embrace the learning experience of making chutney ... and adding value to their produce.



Members of the Zimele Rural Women's Empowerment Organisation in Mtubatuba, a Biowatch project site, recently attended a review and planning workshop in Scottburgh. After spending time reflecting on their experience with Biowatch and on the development of their organisation, the farmers visited a Siyavuna Community Fresh Produce Co-operative collection point in the Ugu District where they were shown how produce delivered by registered members was sorted, weighed and paid for.

Bottled & branded Learning to add value

Biowatch farmers from KwaHhohho, Tshaneni, Pongola, KwaNgwanase and Ingwavuma joined forces in Mtubatuba earlier this year to learn how to make chutney. Farmer groups arrived with fresh organic produce from their homesteads, and under the guidance of master preserver Sarah Jonsson, were introduced to the idea that their produce could be bottled through pickling and chutney production.

While it was emphasised that food is most nutritious when fresh, the idea that unconsumed or un-sold surpluses could be preserved and safely bottled to make tasty, long-lasting relishes for staples such as maize was received with great interest.

Biowatch at "brics-from-below"

Whilst the five heads of state of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) met in Durban in March, a counter summit "brics-from-below" was being held. Organised by social and environmental activists it provided a much needed forum and robust critique of BRICS, with a hard-hitting presentation made by David Fig, Biowatch Board chairperson, in the "Land, Agriculture and Water" session.

After an introductory talk about preserves, farmers prepared their vegetables to make butternut and pineapple chutneys, as well as pickled chillies, using recipes that could be adaptable to whatever vegetables they had available. The recipes were eagerly followed by the apprentice bottlers, and while the chutneys bubbled away, Sarah shared tips, tricks and techniques to keep preserves tasty, hygienic and well cooked.

An "Organic GM-Free Produce" logo, which was designed during a previous Biowatch workshop with the same participants, was printed out on labels. The farmers then stuck these labels on their bottled produce.

For farmers attempting to access markets for their produce under difficult conditions, any expansion of their options to add value, store, transport and present their produce is potentially advantageous.

This practical exercise showed farmers that their surplus produce could be turned into novel items for sale, adding value to their GM-free, agro-ecological produce.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- **International Anti-Monsanto Day: 25 May**
- Small-holder farmer think-tank: 4-5 July
- Farmer exchange in KwaZulu-Natal: 12-16 August



Biowatch Bulletin will keep you updated.

If you would like to join our e-mailing list, please e-mail your details to biowatch@mweb.co.za