

2007 - Terminator Technology

Terminator would be a GM tool with enormous power. A plant patent is restricted to 20 years but, once released, Terminator may be forever. The technology owner would retain exclusive control of the chemicals and genetic techniques necessary to restore fertility in the seeds created for sale. Melvin Oliver of the USDA who first conceived of Terminator said, "The new technique is to protect US technology and seed patents." Seed company Delta & Pine Land is now glasshouse testing what they aptly named their "Technology Protection System". Monsanto now owns Delta. The US government's commitment to project power around the world on behalf of corporations was confirmed by George Bush's remarks on arriving in Sydney for the APEC summit, which included a reference to intellectual property rights as a key topic on his agenda. If Terminator were commercialised, farmers would be prevented from using the ancient practices of harvesting, saving and replanting seed, used since agriculture began at least 13,000 years ago. Farmers rely on using these processes to adapt their local varieties to unique environmental, soil and management conditions. As climates change globally local crop development will become even more crucial, especially for the 1.4 billion indigenous people and peasant farmers who depend entirely on farm-saved seed. We are all custodians, for future generations, of a wonderfully diverse array of food and fiber crops, developed in the public domain by generations of farmers and seed savers. But patents, plant breeders rights and terminator technologies are being used to privatise the global biological commons without our consent Monsanto, the largest GM company, is already suing many North American farmers for alleged GM crop patent infringement. The farmers are charged with saving and replanting seeds that contain the company's patented GM genes, without paying a technology fee. In at least some cases, the genes may have arrived through cross contamination but that has been judged irrelevant by North American courts. If commercialised, Terminator would enable Monsanto to enforce its patents without the costly lawsuits, bad publicity and opposition created by suing hundreds of farmers. Following global public protests in 1999, Monsanto said, "We are making a public commitment not to commercialise sterile seed technologies, such as the one dubbed 'Terminator'." But now its revised policy, "does not rule out the potential development and use of one of these technologies in the future. The company will continue to study the risks and benefits of this technology on a case-by-case basis." Monsanto's new and old pledges can be compared at <http://www.banterminator.org>. Although the Australian government says it does not have an official public policy on Terminator, Monsanto's case-by-case approach resonates with its position. The Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) claims they 'do not have a ban on, or overtly support' Terminator, but also says that any proposals to release Terminator crops in Australia would be assessed 'on a case by case basis by the Office of Gene Technology Regulator'. This position compromises Australia's commitment to the de facto global moratorium on Terminator, agreed to in 2000 by all the parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The CBD recommended that all governments prohibit field-testing and commercialisation of GURTS. Since early 2005, Australia, Canada and New Zealand have worked with the US government and industry to overturn the moratorium. For instance, at a CBD meeting in Spain in January 2006, the Australian delegation argued that the precautionary approach be removed from the agreement and that Terminator technologies be assessed on a case-by-case basis. US delegates advised our delegation how to argue for Terminator, since the US - not a party to the convention - has no official standing or vote at the CBD. The global moratorium on Terminator will again be under threat when the CBD meets early in 2008. The only certain defense against suicide

seeds is a complete and permanent ban, supported by over 400 civil society groups worldwide - farmers, indigenous, religious, and environment groups, etc. See: www.banterminator.org/endorsements. National governments can ban Terminator technology. Brazilian law prohibits the use, sale, registration, patenting and licensing of Terminator technology and India has banned the registration of Terminator seeds. Australia should also totally and permanently ban Terminator now, to protect food security, farm incomes, crop diversity and the environment, for this and all future generations.