

GM Crops Should Not Be Patented

Life shouldn't be patented

Genes are produced by nature, not by companies. Therefore, companies should not be able to patent genes. When a company inserts just one gene into a plant genome, they are making a tiny change – hardly worthy of deserving a patent on the entire plant. But biotech companies can currently claim the rights to a plant – and all of its desirable traits, such as yield potential, time to harvest, nutritional qualities, etc. – just by adding in one gene.

Seed patents limit traditional plant breeding

Traditionally, farmers would take the seeds from the best plants in their fields and plant those seeds the next year in a practice called seed saving. However, because seed companies now have patents on the seeds, farmers cannot plant seeds from their own crops because they don't truly "own" them. They must therefore purchase new seeds every year, which hurts their profits. This also has the effect of limiting traditional plant breeding and research. Biotech companies prohibit research using their seeds, so individuals are not allowed to use them for plant breeding.ⁱ Companies can restrict research by choosing which scientists are allowed to purchase seed, demand the right to approve of reports before they are published, and prohibit research comparing their seeds to another brand.ⁱⁱ

Fewer seed options

Ten international companies hold patents on 65% of seed for major crops around the world, and Monsanto controls 60% of the world's soybean and corn seedⁱⁱⁱ. As these seed companies get larger, small seed companies are put out of business, which reduces the options that farmers have. It is becoming more and more difficult for farmers to purchase non-GM seeds, although few types of GM seeds are actually available. This affects not just farmers, but also the environment: when most acres of farmland are planted in just a few kinds of seed, biodiversity is threatened. Genetically similar plants are more vulnerable to attack from disease and pests, and if we don't preserve seeds from many varieties of a crop, we lose genes that could be useful in the future.

Rising costs

Since just a few companies own patents on most of the seed that is planted, they can charge much more for their seeds. Between 1995 and 2011, cost of soybean seeds increased 325%.^{iv} This is because biotech companies charge an extra fee for the technology involved in producing the seeds. Farmers in less developed countries are also concerned. If the seed companies charge as much for the seeds abroad as they do in the U.S., small farmers in developing nations will not be able to afford them.

ⁱ No Patents on Seeds (2012). "How big companies and patents are hampering plant breeding" p. 5 http://www.no-patents-on-seeds.org/sites/default/files/news/fs_seeds_ep_en_fin_0.pdf

ⁱⁱ Center for Food Safety & Save Our Seeds (2013). Seed Giants vs. U.S. Farmers. p. 19.
http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/files/seed-giants_final_04424.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Center for Food Safety. “The Role of GE Seeds and Patent Systems”
<http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/issues/303/seeds/the-role-of-ge-seeds-and-the-patent-system> Accessed July 1, 2013.

^{iv} Center for Food Safety & Save Our Seeds (2013). Seed Giants vs. U.S. Farmers. p. 16.
http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/files/seed-giants_final_04424.pdf