



RAFI

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Seedless in Seattle - Terminator Tech Trumps Trade Talks

“Traitor” Sanctions?

Refusal to reject Suicide Seeds provokes fear that U.S. may use Terminator as a ‘political weapon’ to enforce unilateral trade rules. From Trade Sanctions to Trait Sanctions?

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman’s failure to reject Terminator Technology (a genetic modification that renders harvested seed sterile) may leave some World Trade Organization (WTO) trade delegations sleepless in Seattle. When the WTO meets next week in Seattle, governments are expected to endorse a new bout of global trade negotiations dubbed the ‘Millennium Round.’ The United States will press for U.S. biased agricultural rules and tougher intellectual property provisions related to biotechnology. Some delegates and civil society organizations (CSO) attending the Seattle meeting fear that Uncle Sam will be tempted to use Terminator or (more likely) “Traitor” (the remote-control of crop production traits) Technology to unilaterally dictate trade policies to countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Trait Sanctions: According to Pat Mooney, Executive Director of RAFI, a Canadian-based CSO, “It would be nonsense to suggest that the USA is developing trait control technology for economic or biowarfare purposes. On the other hand,” Mooney adds, “history shows that it would be imprudent to believe that the USA will turn its back on a technological weapon that could help fulfill its trade and foreign policy goals.” “When we met with Mr. Glickman a month ago,” Hope Shand, Research Director for RAFI-USA recalls, “we told him that Monsanto and AstraZeneca had abandoned the Terminator and that the Rockefeller Foundation, along with international agricultural research institutions and several countries, are all opposed to the commercial use of the technology. Glickman still refused to abandon the sterility strategy. This is kindling needless and undoubtedly premature alarm that the technologies could become a kind of trait sanction.”

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) jointly developed the original Terminator with Delta and Pine Land Co. Later, Delta and Pine Land accepted a takeover bid from Monsanto, which was crafting its own version of the Terminator. When Monsanto agreed to scrap the technology, USDA officials continued to defend their patent and said that they hoped the company would reconsider. The USDA’s stance added more fuel to international speculation that the U.S. may develop other uses for the technology.

Treaty Transgression? Worry that Traitor Tech has bioweapons potential comes as negotiators in Geneva prepare for what they hope will be the wrap-up round of a multi-year effort to modernize the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). The major stumbling blocks to the revised Treaty are the United States and U.S. biotech companies who oppose some of the protocol’s R&D and production monitoring provisions.

Traitor Terrorism? “In its essence,” says Hope Shand, “the Terminator is just one manifestation of Traitor Tech which in turn, is a biotech mechanism to switch crop traits on or off through the application of an external chemical inducer like a herbicide. It’s theoretically possible to manipulate another country’s crop production,” Shand explains, “either by giving - or withholding - access to the inducer.” In Ottawa, Julie Delahanty of RAFI offers an example, “Zimbabwe grows cotton - if Delta and Pine Land succeeds in merging with Monsanto, the new enterprise will control much of the world’s conventional and biotech cotton seed supply. Monsanto also has *Round-Up*, the world’s most commonly-used herbicide. As a commercial strategy, Monsanto could develop new generations of high-tech seeds with beneficial traits which Zimbabwe’s farmers would welcome. In order to protect their market, Monsanto could embed the traits in such a way that the crop would fail unless farmers spray their fields regularly with a specially-enhanced formulation of *Round-Up*. No spray, no trait, no harvest. This is more dangerous than Terminator,” Delahanty continues, “Because Terminator only sterilizes the seed so it can’t be planted the following season. Traitor Tech can render the current crop useless unless farmers commit to repeat purchases of the inducer chemical. If

Zimbabwe gets into a textile dispute with the United States, all the U.S. Trade Representative has to do is threaten to deny export licenses for the souped-up *Round-Up*. This act alone would bring farmers to their knees.” In Uruguay, RAFI’s Silvia Ribeiro agrees. “Trait sanctions can come through many technological means,” she insists, “including the remote control of traits for yield, nutrition, height, or hardiness. It’s possible to engineer ‘junkie’ crops that can’t be harvested without their chemical ‘fix’. Turn off the herbicide supply and you can manufacture an instant crop failure.”

Millennium Round-Up? According to RAFI, Traitor technologies give the U.S. a unique and powerful weapon that could be employed to enforce its own agricultural and patent rules on trading partners. The use of the technology to gain control of the world’s food supply should be discussed during the upcoming Millennium Round. “The United States has consistently used its own trade and agricultural legislation to threaten and apply sanctions against its trading rivals,” Silvia Ribeiro notes, “It has rarely hesitated to defy GATT or WTO procedures and international norms if they don’t advance U.S. interests. If the U.S. wants to shed its ‘bad boy’ image it should declare Terminator and Traitor Tech contrary to public morality. Governments in Seattle should acknowledge the primacy of national food security and the environment over trade agreements.” “Seattle should not launch the Millennium *Round-Up*,” Hope Shand insists.

“Not only should Traitor Tech be rejected in Seattle,” Pat Mooney of RAFI adds, “in Geneva, the Ad Hoc Working Group revising the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention should also challenge the U.S. research as a violation of Article One of the protocol.” Julie Delahanty concurs, “The Terminator was developed by the U.S. Government for the announced purpose of denying farmers in foreign countries the right to save seed. When the patent was granted in March 1998, USDA inventors were explicit on this point and offered no agronomic justification for the technology. Countries that accept Traitor Tech can have their food security held to ransom.” Aside from the USDA, every major ag biotech company in North America and the EU is developing its own Trait sanctions. Pat Mooney concludes, “Governments in Seattle and Geneva have to condemn Trait Sanctions as an offensive biological weapon.” Unless the U.S. can prove that the Terminator has beneficial uses – or that its research on the Terminator is purely defensive – the United States is at least breaching the spirit of the BTWC. “USDA bureaucrats have been taking creative writing classes trying to come up with unique conditions that would make the technology useful. It’s a bit like trying to explain the benefits of a lobotomy to a political prisoner,” Mooney suggests. “RAFI does not believe that the U.S. has intentionally “weaponized wheat” or intended to turn Terminator or Traitor into tools for economic warfare. We frankly doubt that the notion has even crossed their minds. If the trade opportunity arises the United States will almost certainly exploit its weapons potential. In the final analysis, Trait sanctions are war on farmers and on the hungry.”

Background:

25 Years of Food as a Weapon: Would the U.S. Government use food to impose its trade policies on other countries? “Food has long been a political tool in U.S. foreign policy,” Mooney points out. It was 25 years ago, in November 1974, that USDA Secretary Earl Butz told a World Food Conference in Rome that food was a weapon, calling it “one of the principal tools in our negotiating kit.” That policy statement by a Republican Agriculture Secretary also represented the view of a one-time U.S. Vice-President, Hubert Humphrey of the (more liberal) Democratic Party. As far back as 1957, Humphrey told a U.S. audience, “if you are looking for a way to get people to lean on you and to be dependent on you in terms of their cooperation with you, it seems to me that food dependence would be terrific.”

Excerpt from the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention currently being negotiated in Geneva:

Article I. Each State Party to this Convention undertakes never in any circumstances to develop, produce, stockpile or otherwise acquire or retain:

- (1) Microbial or other biological agents, or toxins whatever their origin or method of production, of types and in quantities that have no justification for prophylactic, protective, or other peaceful purposes;*
- (2) Weapons, equipment, or means of delivery designed to use such agents or toxins for hostile purposes or in armed conflict.*

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