

“Landless” Women Workers Destroy GMO Lab in Brazil

Written by Joan Russow
Sunday, 15 March 2015 14:40 -

Rural Activists Fearful of "Contamination" Stage Violent Protest at FuturaGene Factory

By [BELÉN MARTY](#) PAMAMPOST

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[Español](#) On Thursday, March 5, at 6 a.m., around 1,000 female members of Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST) armed with sticks and knives [broke into](#) a cellulose company in San Paulo State and [destroyed](#) millions of samples of genetically modified (GM) eucalyptus saplings. In a [press release](#), the group reported that the GM prototype contained “a carcinogenic pesticide.”
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Brazil's Landless Workers Movement is waging an ongoing campaign against GM crops. (

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FuturaGene Brazil Technology, a firm based in the city of Itapetininga, was the object of the protest by the rural farm workers, who were seeking to draw attention to the alleged danger of planting genetically modified organisms, on the same day as Brazil's National Technical Committee for Biosecurity (CTNBio) was due to approve the new GM product.+

However, as a result of the violent episode, a spokesperson from the Ministry of Science and Technology suspended CTNBio's meeting.+

FuturaGene sources meanwhile stated that the new variant of eucalyptus, also known as H421, could bring up to 20 percent greater yields than non-modified plants.+

“The strategic focus of FuturaGene is to increase the competitiveness of biomass coming from forests planted principally to supply pulp, paper, bio-energy, and bio-combustibles. The principal crops that FutureGene works with are eucalyptus and poplars,” the firm's website explains.+

However, the MST claimed that “the increase in productivity of around 20 percent, derived from the plantation of genetically modified eucalyptus, doesn't take into account to risks of potential health and environmental problems.”+

FuturaGene Chief of Operations Eduardo José de Melo stated that the firm was fully complying with existing legislation and safeguards.+

“The product is safe for society and the environment,” he argued, lamenting the damage caused by the protesters: “the losses were considerable, and we've lost multiple years of

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technological development.”+

“Some people became very upset, some started to cry when they saw the destruction of many years of work,” he added.+

The group of women entered FuturaGene greenhouses where they destroyed millions of plant samples, according to military police Lieutenant-Colonel Marcelo Alves Marques. The GM samples had been in development since 2001. The company is yet to reveal the exact quantity of trees destroyed.+

“When they entered there were very few staff, and they ended up taking control of the firm. No one was hurt,” De Melo explained, adding that employees hid from the protesters because they feared for their safety.+

Honey “Contamination” Fears

Alongside environmental and health concerns, the MST also cited fears over the impact that GM eucalyptus crops could have on Brazil’s “culturally significant” honey industry.+

Eucalyptus honey is produced by bees that pollinate the species. MST noted that Brazil is currently the world’s 10th biggest producer of honey, with 50 percent of its production destined for export, and suggested that honey stocks could be “contaminated” by the GM product.+

“When the pollen of the GM eucalyptus has the gene artificially inserted, any honey produced in hives whose bees visit GM eucalyptus flowers will be contaminated by genetically modified material,” the MST statement read.+

Moreover, it added, the detection of transplanted genes in honey could damage the livelihood of beekeepers, preventing them from marketing their products as organic and thus risking losses for the sector.+

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The rural movement also argued that GM crops require huge quantities of pesticides, particularly [sulfluramid](#) , described as a carcinogen and prohibited in 152 countries.+

The MST finally [argued](#) that the new species’s rapid growth — requiring only five years to grow to maturity instead of seven — would require greater consumption of water, leading to further desertification of the soil. +

[Translated by Laurie Blair.](#) Edited by Guillermo Jimenez. +