

# Laxmamma

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Laxmamma

Are farmers still using local varieties of seeds?

The government has brought to farmers many seed varieties and hybrids and aggressively promoted them. Farmers believed the government and lost their own seeds. The government brought chemicals along with seeds and said if you use the two you get good yields. After one or two harvests, the yields dropped. They also caused so many diseases such as skin rashes and gum diseases. Animals did not relish the fodder. Soils lost their fertility. Crops that grow on creepers that creep on cropland such as horsegram, cowpea did not grow along with the new seeds [In Laxmamma's region, farmers grow at least 12-15 crops at the same time on the same space]. Gradually we lost our seed varieties.

People were taken in by the propaganda and became greedy. They were told that their farming system was cumbersome – “You grow so many different crops on the same land which gives small yields. Our seeds give you large yields” – and they were wasting their time growing millets.

People believed this and gradually moved away from their seeds. As the dependence on government seeds increased, our own seeds started disappearing.

What do you think of “ownership” of seeds?

Seeds should be in the hands of women. Men don't know how to deal with seeds, they don't know how to save them, preserve them and look after them. Men are attracted to money, to travel, and to buy clothes. But our concerns are more fundamental. As women we want to grow more food. If we have surplus, we buy a few more cattle, increase the capacity of our agriculture, and grow more crops, better crops. Women know which seed to plant and where to plant the seed in her farm so that she gets the maximum yield from a particular seed. She also thinks about the fodder for her animals



**Laxmamma** is woman farmer in Humnapur village in the Deccan Plateau of South India with just 2.5 acres (1 hectare) of very poor soil. Laxmamma is a leading “Seed Keeper” making great efforts to increase the number of varieties grown by herself and many other women to stop the loss of varieties. Laxmamma and her mother expanded their collection from six to 85 crop varieties in just six years. Many women have started sowing rare crops in their fields and today they have retrieved 60 varieties that might have been lost forever. Gene banks have now been established and seeds are given out to other people in neighbouring villages. Laxmamma is also very involved with the Deccan Development Society (DDS - [www.ddsindia.com](http://www.ddsindia.com)), both in campaigning and in video filming.

and the health of her soil. All this is a part of a woman's thinking.

Seeds should be in the hands of farmers. Not in the hands of companies. We don't know what chemicals they use for these seeds. Our seeds stay “clean” from chemicals. Companies are profit motivated. They sell seeds. Farmers share seeds.

Farmers must own the knowledge over seeds. Our knowledge decides what we should grow, what

we should eat, what we should feed our animals with. It decides the way we save our earth and the millions of living beings on the earth. It is the way the whole of life is protected. Losing it is losing our being.

*As a seed saver where does your knowledge come from?*

From my grandmother and from my mother. Even as a child I used to see the way they stored and saved the seeds. I used to think that when I grow up I also should save seeds like them. I also must share it with people the way they did. I dreamt of cultivating relationships with people the way they did.

*So which "technologies" do you think are most relevant for small farmers today?*

We must have the seeds which are used to our soils. We don't trust external technologies. There is no transparency about them. Farmers don't participate in developing them. We don't use the same parameters as the scientific institutions for our agriculture. The two parameters don't match. We think that the institutional technologies are mostly hyped up. With our own seeds and technologies, we are not only able to feed ourselves, but are also feeding the landless and other non farming people. In any case we don't want to depend upon "outside" technologies.

*What are your expectations from the government?*

There are many very small farmers, those who have less than half an acre of land. There are people who have no land at all. The government must give all of them some land. The government should also provide some animals to them. On the land, and with animals, people can sustain themselves.

The government should concentrate on the kind of ecological agriculture that small farmers like us are pursuing and ensure it is in their educational goals. More universities and institutions must research our methods and popularise them.

Farming laws must be controlled by farmers. If GM seeds and other such things have to be passed [by law], it has to be first approved by farmers. Farmers trust their governments. Governments must not betray their trust. Governments must not hype up new technologies. They must also warn us about their possible negative effects.

*You have been campaigning against terminator technology. Where did you first hear about "terminator" from?*

In one of the meetings in DDS [Deccan Development Society] and from some farmers who had gone to Bangkok for a meeting on GM contamination.

*As a farmer what concerns you most about "terminator technology"?*

If I plant a harvested seed on my land, it gives no food, no fodder. It is as if the light has gone out of my farming. A complete death of my agriculture. I will have no more control over my seeds. My family and my animals will be deprived of food and fodder. My entire relationship as a Seed Keeper with my community will be in peril.

*What has your experience been with the "ban terminator" campaign in your village or region?*

I personally collected about 2,500 signatures from farmers, on a petition we had made against it, to the Prime Minister of India. I spoke to them about the Terminator seeds which do not germinate again and about GM rice

which might be injected with pig genes. Farmers heard me. Those who were literate read the pamphlets we had made on the Terminator seeds. They were horrified and said, "this is no good for humanity" and immediately signed the petition. I told the non literate farmers that "this primarily concerns us, the food producers. But it also concerns the 'employed' who don't farm but eat the food that we produce. If we don't stop the [toxic] GM seeds, it will be akin to cheating them. We should never allow the Terminator seeds into our farming". Their response was that this is a danger to our farming and we should stop it by all means. And they signed the petition saying that this campaign was a very good effort and people should engage in this.

I also went to the village fairs where there were a large number of people, farmers, vegetable sellers, and artisans – everyone signed it. They were unanimous saying that such seeds should never be allowed into our agriculture. "Already the 'market' seeds have taken away agriculture from us. If these seeds come in, we will be totally drowned".

I also sat in front of the houses of political leaders where many people visit. I explained to them about Terminator seeds and got their signatures.

We took part in a massive campaign on Terminator in the villages in our region. That was the season of religious fairs in our region. The sun scorches and the heat is unbearable. We used the opportunity to put up stalls where we served cold water free of charge. When people came to drink water, we chatted to them, explained Terminator and got them to sign the petition.

Altogether, just in our villages and the region we were able to get over 100,000 signatures on the petition. 

