

Seed laws that criminalise farmers

Overview of research and educational materials from GRAIN

Twenty-five years ago, GRAIN got started with a focus on seeds, and it has remained a central focus of our work. The biodiversity in farmers' fields is eroding at alarming rates, while corporations are reaching unprecedented levels of control over seeds through their push for hybrid and genetically modified seeds. Around the world, governments are promoting or allowing restrictive seed and intellectual property laws that grant exclusive power to the corporate sector while limiting the ability of small farmers to save, exchange and further develop their own varieties. But peasant- and citizen-led movements are emerging and growing to challenge these developments and establish networks to conserve local seeds. GRAIN is part of this growing movement, which it supports by contributing research, information, capacity and movement building.

The highlight of our work on seeds during the last year was undoubtedly our seed laws booklet and database. This research and writing project started in 2014 as a joint project with La Vía Campesina. The idea was to jointly produce an educational tool on the advance of corporate seed laws around the world and the struggles against them. Debates and mobilisations on such laws had sprung up in many countries and we felt the need for educational materials to better understand these laws, what's behind them, who are pushing for them, and how popular struggles had successfully defeated them in several countries.

We compiled a database of country case studies, analysing what farmers are allowed or not allowed to do with their seeds, according to national laws. This was a massive research effort that allowed us to better understand what is happening, and to make that information available as both a [map](#) and a [dataset](#). At the same time, we created an educational [booklet](#) based on direct interviews with key people in many countries (around half a dozen countries per continent). The text explains the struggle around seeds in each country and the situation with seed laws there. It was published and widely distributed among farmers movements around the world. The booklet could not include all the material we had compiled, so we published many more country cases [online](#). We also created a [poster](#) with actions that can be taken by local communities to fight seed laws. As part of the information package, we also updated GRAIN's [table](#) on how trade agreements affect what farmers can do with their seeds.

It was worth the effort! The booklet and accompanying materials were a great success. We launched a first 2,000-copy print run in three languages at the World Social Forum in Tunis, in March 2015. It was a good opportunity for farmer delegations and social movements to bring copies home for distribution at the national level, and we ran out of copies within a month's time. But people kept on asking for more, and during the year we made two reprints. In addition, we got requests from farmers movements in Brazil and Mozambique for a version in Portuguese, which we were able to produce quickly. The Brazilian small farmers organisation MPA, which is heavily involved in seed struggles across the country, printed an edition for their members, and UNAC in Mozambique did the same. We estimate that, altogether, around 20,000 people have had access to the printed version of this booklet. Around 8,000 people accessed the booklet from our website, and a similar number of visitors read it on La Vía Campesina's site. In addition, at least two dozen other organisations re-published the booklet in whole or in part on their sites, and several news agencies reported on it. The poster was also freely translated in more languages than we could track (Thai, Korean, etc). The outreach we achieved with this material was clearly extensive.

One result of this work was that farmers organisations in Latin America asked us to produce training materials to help them understand legal texts on seed laws. In response, we produced the primer "[UPOV 91 and other seed laws](#)" that takes readers through a step-by-step reading of these legal texts and what they mean for farmers. In addition, we published an [analysis](#) of the development of seed laws in Argentina with respect to GMOs and a [media release](#) about the dangers of Golden Rice in Asia. Finally, the Gaia Foundation produced a [video](#) in which GRAIN staff explains the importance of local seed saving and the problems associated with the industrial seed system.

In sum, GRAIN produced the following publications under this programme area during the last year:

- [Media release: Golden Rice is unnecessary and dangerous](#), March 2015
- [Seed laws that criminalise farmers: resistance and fightback](#), April 2015
- [Seed laws that criminalise farmers: poster, map, tables and additional country cases](#), April 2015
- [Infographic: Stop seed laws that criminalise farmers & defend local seeds!](#), April 2015
- [UPOV 91 and other seed laws: a basic primer on how companies intend to control and monopolise seeds](#), October 2015
- [Trade deals criminalise farmers' seeds](#), November 2015 (and further updated since)
- [Video: seeds in the hands of farmers](#), December 2015
- [Argentina: New “national” GMOs. Resistance multiplies](#), December 2015