

Bt cotton helped Indian farmers, but success not uniform

Cotton is a light and breathable fabric but it sure does get itself into some very contentious debates. It has been a central player in colonialism in India, in the American Civil War, in the practice of slavery, and now, in the GMO wars.

Cotton with an inserted gene that produces Cry came into the Indian market in 2002. It protects cotton from its main predator, the bollworm. Before 2002, even though cotton was one of India's main cash crops, the yield was one of the lowest in the world. Pests were a huge problem, and farmers spent more money on pesticide for cotton than for any other crop.

Bt cotton came with the promise of not needing pesticide at all, because it would inherently fight back the bollworm. Before the government approved it, Bt cotton had already created a buzz and seeds from Monsanto had been smuggled in to sell in the black market. After it was approved, by 2010, more than 90% of cotton growers in India used Bt cotton. But while Bt cotton was being widely adopted, activists raised the alarm. Dr. Vandana Shiva in particular called it the seeds of suicide.

Anyone (like your humble servant, The Odd Pantry) asking a simple question — 'so, how is it working out?' — is immediately assaulted by a battery-pack of confusing assertions. Yields have gone up! No! Farmer suicides have gone up! Spraying of insecticide has reduced! No! The bollworm has developed resistance to Bt and aphids have attacked cotton! What is true? What is not?

So far, overall, Bt cotton has helped Indian farmers. It has helped them, overall, get better yields and make more money. But, it has not been a uniform success. The Indian context in particular has had a bit of a culture clash with the more modern economy that Monsanto usually operates in. When Indian farmers have crop failures, this is often a life-destroying event.

Read the full, original article: [GMO cotton and the Indian farmer](#)