



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

6 October 2018

Save Future Generation through Seed Saving and Sharing

For this year's Green Action Week, 45 organisations from 25 countries campaign together on the theme "Sharing Community". In conjunction of this action week, the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) is organizing this seed sharing fair to popularise seed saving and sharing among Malaysian consumers.

In the process of promoting chemical-free farming in the past few decades, CAP realised the grave scenario of seed dependency, chemically-tainted seeds and the escalating cost of seeds, all of which revealed the insidious politics lurking behind seeds which is beyond the comprehension of the general public.

Realising the importance of seeds as the first link in the food chain and the need to alert consumers on this issue, CAP is encouraging seed saving through its urban garden and natural farming education programmes. Seed saving, or the collecting and preserving of seeds from plants, is a practice that dates back to the origin of farming. It was by learning to save seeds from the plants, that we were able to start cultivating crops and become a civilized society. It is also one of the sacred ways of maintaining the biodiversity of the earth.

Unfortunately, with the onslaught of industrial agriculture, seed saving appears to be disappearing as a common farm practice. Large corporations have dominated the food and seed production. As a result, a nation once full of seed saving farmers has boiled down to a handful of corporations controlling seeds.

Vandana Shiva, a renowned scientist and environmental activist who speaks passionately about the importance of sustainable agriculture and preserving seed varieties says "Seeds are containment of life. Seed is created to renew, to multiply, to be shared and to spread. Seed is life itself. Corporations such as Monsanto, Dupont, Syngenta, BASF and Dow have reduced seeds to private property. Seed is a common resource, and we have to protect it for future generations."

Seeds once the domain of traditional farmers now has been blatantly conquered by the giant companies with the intention of controlling the world food production. Most of the seeds have been bred by farmers over millennia. The seeds companies now claiming it is illegal for farmers to save seeds. The first and foremost impact of this is a seed monopoly and the disappearance of diversity, an increase in costs and higher use of chemicals. Ultimately consumers are denied the right to know what they are eating.

For instance, if a farmer wishes to grow ladies finger for one acre of land, he has to spend approximately RM180 to RM240 for buying seeds alone for one season of planting. This will persist for every season if the farmer does not save his own seeds. This creates an everlasting financial burden on the farmers. This cost can be saved if farmers collect their own seeds. Above all, seed-dependency and slavery could be minimised.

To preserve the shelf-life, seeds are coated with dangerous chemicals which threaten the health of farmers when handling them for planting. These seeds are mostly [M1] hybrid seeds which farmers find from the same plant, when used for replanting do not give yield or give very poor yield. Therefore, farmers have to buy the same seeds again from the same companies for another season of planting and this vicious cycle persists.

CAP through its chemical-free farming programme has been continuously alerting farmers on the dangers of these seeds dependency for the whole farming community and food production. In a survey done by CAP in 2015, it was revealed that vegetable seeds sold in Malaysian shops are treated with a fifth generation insecticides called neonicotinoids which is a neuro-poison. Unlike the original seeds, these treated seeds are coloured.

Subsequently, CAP alerted the Penang Agricultural Department regarding the neonicotinoids-tainted seeds. During the same period CAP also had urged the government not to join the International Convention on the Protection of Plant Varieties, which prohibits farmers from freely saving, exchanging and selling their farm-saved seeds.

One way of breaking the seeds dependency is through searching and identifying traditional seeds (those seeds that haven't gone through genetic modification), learn the methods of collecting and preserving them, and sharing and exchanging these seeds among the farmers.

The Seeds Sharing Fair by CAP serves as a platform for collecting, sharing spreading and proliferating traditional seed varieties with the noble intention of ensuring food safety and sustainability for future generation.

To further alert consumers on this issue, CAP has published a guide on seed saving. This pictorial guide contains 10 cards with explanation on how to collect and preserve one's own seeds of the following plants, namely *bachelor's button*, *brinjal*, *butterfly pea*, *four o'clock flower*, *holy basil*, *lady's finger*, *long beans*, *marigold*, *papaya*, *raja ulam*, *snake gourd* and *spinach*. This is a healthy step towards encouraging Malaysians to save their own seeds, share or exchange and use them for planting.

Let us make seed saving a part of our life.

S. M. Mohamed Idris
President
Consumers Association Of Penang

Note to Editor:

Green Action Week is an initiative by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) and is carried out in coordination with Consumers International (CI) of which CAP is a member.

In Malaysia - GM vegetables (if any) are not genetically modified. GM crops for food have not been allowed for planting here.