

June 12, 2010

Dr. Rajiv Shah
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20523-1000

Dear Dr. Shah,

I write as a person of conscience concerned about Haiti's recovery from the January, 2010, earthquake, and the policies that are being implemented to help build a sustainable food economy. Boosting local food production is essential. However, I am particularly dismayed by the donation of more than 400 tons of hybrid seeds to Haiti by the Monsanto Corporation, under the auspices of USAID's WINNER Project. I do not want to see small Haitian farmers grow dependent upon foreign assistance to plant their crops.

More than 10,000 small Haitian farmers marched near Hinche on June 4 to oppose this approach, insisting that industrial agricultural methods do not translate easily to small farms. Further, using hybrids widely may endanger indigenous Haitian seeds that are already resistant to pest and local diseases and do not require chemical pesticides. I believe that Haitian farmers ought to decide what form of agriculture is best for the land they've farmed for centuries and what seeds are best to plant – else we run the risk of returning to old patterns of colonial behavior and paternalism. These farmers say that pesticide-coated seeds are designed to be planted by mechanical means, but, on Haiti's small farms, will be handled by the bare hands of women and children. Since hybrids do not reproduce true, traditionally independent farmers will have to buy new seeds for each planting season. All that data means that farmers could run the risk of slipping further into poverty and debt, while seed and farming supply merchants have new business opportunities.

I ask USAID to decline the use of Monsanto's hybrid seeds in the WINNER Project, as well as those of other seed companies, and to stop promoting methods of industrial agriculture in Haiti, since the majority of the country's farming is done by small farmers. Instead, USAID can support the improvement of sustainable agricultural practices for small farmers, concentrating on food production, erosion control, soil conservation, irrigation and environmental rehabilitation, focuses that are more responsive to Haiti's small farmers. We urge you to listen to small farmers and their organizations, such as the Peasant Movement of Papay, and to support their efforts to restore sustainable small scale agriculture in Haiti.

Sincerely,