INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL MONITORING OF SYNGENTA’S SEED SUPPLY CHAIN IN INDIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From July 2013 to March 2014, during periods of peak seed production activity, the FLA conducted unannounced independent external monitoring (IEM) visits to assess working conditions at Syngenta’s seed supplier farms in India. Three assessments took place in Andhra Pradesh, two in Karnataka, and one in Gujarat, where Syngenta is sourcing corn, rice and sunflower seeds. The detailed reports can be found at: hwww.fairlabor.org/affiliate/syngenta

Teams consisting of a mix of FLA staff and external assessors visited 72 smallholder farms. They interviewed 157 workers who were involved in different farm activities such as detasseling, cross-pollination, weeding, and pesticide application. In India, field crops are generally cultivated by small growers. Syngenta works with seed organizers who act as intermediaries between the growers and the company. For sunflowers, family laborers are often engaged in all activities except for cross-pollination, for which growers hire additional casual workers. For corn, workers engaged in detasseling activities are hired directly by the seed organizers to complete the task in a stipulated time frame of 30 days. Those workers are engaged on a contract basis and are paid based on a piece rate system.

Independent External Monitoring Findings

1. CODE AWARENESS AND GRIEVANCE SYSTEM

In all assessment locations, Syngenta had taken initiatives to educate the growers and family laborers about its code of conduct (COC) through pre-season meetings at the seed organizer offices. However, assessors found that the trainees had high awareness only of the health and safety and child labor elements of the COC, and not on other elements. The scope of these pre-season meetings was limited to a few growers and some family workers, with no further efforts by Syngenta to educate other workers on the Company COC. Workers did not attend the pre-season meetings and were not part of any kind of training. Wall paintings describing some COC elements (mostly child labor and health and safety) were available in some villages without covering the whole production scope. Neither growers nor workers displayed an awareness of the company’s grievance policy and procedure, hindering them to raise any grievance through that channel.
2. CHILD LABOR
No child labor was found on the farms during the assessments. However, the growers did not maintain any age verification documents or other reliable source for verifying the age of young workers. The growers also did not have awareness of the terms and conditions to be followed while employing young workers. In Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, young workers were found on farms working long hours and involved in hazardous processes not suitable to young workers.

3. NON-DISCRIMINATION
Assessors identified gender discrimination in wages and work allocation in the visited farms in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka states. For work with the sunflower and corn crops in Karnataka, women and men were not paid the same daily wage for performing the same tasks. In Andhra Pradesh, assessors found that the actual division of work, which is based on gender, had earning implications for men and women engaged in various production activities. Usually, women are preferred for transplanting and weeding activities, which are labor-intensive and paid at lower rates, whereas men are preferred for ploughing, spraying pesticides, and applying fertilizer, which are less labor-intensive with higher wages.

4. HEALTH AND SAFETY
In the three visited states, assessors found that Syngenta had made efforts to educate the growers on health and safety issues through chemical management trainings and distribution of first-aid kits and personal protective equipment (PPE). However, the coverage of these initiatives was limited to a few growers. Hence, many issues were identified during the external monitoring visits. In many instances, workers were found lacking the necessary PPE or any access to first-aid kits. The company's health and safety policy did not clearly specify comprehensive health and safety management systems to be applied at farm level. In all locations, communication to workers about important health and safety procedures were not ensured. MSDS were not made available to the workers. Pictorials were also not available. Growers’ and workers’ awareness of safe chemical handling was very low. In many places, chemicals were not stored at safe places. In Andhra Pradesh, where the seed organizers hired a group of 25 internal migrant workers to perform detasseling activities, these workers were provided with crowded and substandard living conditions, including many hazards such as risk of chemical exposure, hazardous electric wirings, and lack of blankets to face cold weather conditions at night.

5. HOURS OF WORK AND COMPENSATION
In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka states where Syngenta is sourcing corn seeds, assessors found a few non-compliances related to hours of work and compensation. Workers involved in corn detasseling were working long hours, up to 12 hours a day. According to the local legislations, regular working hours should be 6 hours in Andhra Pradesh and 8 hours in Karnataka. Workers were not compensated for overtime work as required by local law. Those groups of internal migrant workers involved in detasseling activities are engaged for a period of 30 to 60 days and work continuously without any rest day.

In the three visited states, minimum wage violations were identified by the assessors. Workers were not paid the legally entitled minimum wage for all farm operations. Minimum wages are
defined by state and by type of farm activities. Growers and workers had no awareness of the legal minimum wage they should pay or get. Growers did not maintain records of hours of work or wages at the visited farms.

Company Action Plans

In response to FLA’s monitoring visits, Syngenta developed and submitted corrective action plans that are included in the FLA monitoring reports. The highlights of these plans include:

1. CODE AWARENESS AND GRIEVANCE SYSTEM

Syngenta reported being committed to improve growers’ and workers’ awareness of the COC, adopting a slightly different approach by crop and location. In Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, and Karnataka, for the sunflower and rice crops, Syngenta reported it will organize awareness campaigns for the growers and workers on all code elements in each village before and during the season. A few selected permanent workers will attend those trainings and will then be responsible to train seasonal workers on farms. In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka for the corn crop, for the specific group of seasonal detasseling workers, the company will conduct worker-awareness sessions for each contracted group before the season, on all elements of the COC. Communication materials like posters, pamphlets, and notices on different aspects of the COC will be distributed during these trainings. In all locations, Syngenta reported it will produce more wall paintings describing all different code elements in short sentences, or will display posters at key places in all production villages. Regarding the grievance procedure, Syngenta reported that it will educate the growers and workers about the grievance policy, procedure, and hotline number during pre-season meetings and awareness training organized at farm level. Syngenta will also explore the possibility of collecting growers’ and workers’ mobile phone numbers and create awareness through SMS alerts.

2. CHILD LABOR

Syngenta reported that it will strengthen growers’ and workers’ awareness of the COC and the importance of keeping and checking documentation for age verification. It will distribute Grower Documentation Kits to growers that can be used to maintain the necessary records. Syngenta will educate the growers on the use of this kit and on maintaining the relevant records at farms. The company also reported that during pre-season and other trainings, it will train the growers and workers about the working conditions required for employing young workers such as the required wages, written parental consent, and working hours not affecting their education. The company plans to explore the possibility of re-enrolling the young workers into the mainstream education. Syngenta will work with the local schools to provide education about working conditions for young workers in the community. Syngenta will also closely monitor the issue of age verification and special regulations for young workers during its internal monitoring visits on the seed supplying farms.

3. NON-DISCRIMINATION

In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka where the issue was identified, Syngenta reported it will conduct an in-depth assessment of the situation with male and female workers involved in different farm operations and will use the findings to arrive at a relevant remediation plan. Syngenta also plans to bring the issue to stakeholder forums to discuss and decide the best
strategy to remediate it. In the meantime, Syngenta will further reinforce the message of equal pay for equal work to the growers, and emphasize the need to offer jobs based on skills rather than other criteria like gender.

4. HEALTH AND SAFETY
Syngenta reported it will develop a health and safety manual with policies and procedures to be followed at farms. This manual will be provided to the growers, who will be educated to use it in an effective manner. The company will educate the seed organizers to provide growers with a form for reporting accident, death, illness and other health and safety issues at farms, and monitor the accidents systematically. Syngenta also reported that it has planned to use different communication materials like posters and pamphlets and will increase the number of wall paintings to spread awareness among workers and community members. The company will also strengthen training programs for growers and workers to cover issues such as usage of PPE, first aid, safe chemical handling, field safety, farm level hazards such as electricity, snakebites, wounds, machines safety, safe drinking water and living quarters for migrant workers. As per their five-year plan, the company plans to install first-aid boxes at key places in all the production villages in a phased manner. The company will motivate the growers and seed organizers to maintain the first-aid boxes at farms. Syngenta reported that it plans to provide appropriate PPE to 20 percent of growers on a pilot basis and depending on the feasibility, will extend it to more growers in a phased manner. For corn production, where seed organizers hire some seasonal workers directly, Syngenta would require them to supply complete PPE to workers involved in detasseling. Regarding living quarters, Syngenta reported that it will utilize the help of its in-house experts to address the safety issues. It will further raise growers’, workers’, and seed organizers’ awareness of the issue and make sure the organizers closely monitor it. Syngenta field team will be also trained on field safety to be able to identify and address such issues in a timely manner.

5. HOURS OF WORK AND COMPENSATION
For corn production, Syngenta reported that it will train and assist the growers and seed organizers in maintaining hours of work records for the hired workers and will educate them about the local laws and regulations concerning overtime. Syngenta will train the seed organizer/growers on implementing proper systems to provide one day off in every seven-day period to the workers. Syngenta will provide attendance records and assist them in capturing the working hours and weekly off and will monitor both these aspects strictly with the support of field team.

Syngenta also reported that it will create awareness among the workers about the local minimum wage rate recommended by the government during village level workers meeting and workers’ awareness sessions. The same information would be communicated through various communication materials such as wall painting, posters, and pamphlets. The company will educate the growers about the legal wage rates in their area and require them to pay the workers as per the local law. Syngenta will make sure the seed organizers pay the minimum wage to workers hired for corn detasseling activity through monitoring and follow up by the regional production staff. The Company will train and assist the growers and seed organizers in maintaining wages records by providing them with Grower Documentation Kits containing code information, attendance sheets, wage rates and working time. Finally, Syngenta will discuss the issue in a local stakeholders forum to develop a strategy to improve wage levels in the long term.