AGRICULTURAL MISSIONS, INC.
POLICY STATEMENT ON GENETIC ENGINEERING IN AGRICULTURE

Introduction:
In recent years there has been much debate and controversy regarding the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in the agricultural sector. Rural communities both in the industrialized and developing countries are faced with the decision of whether or not to use these products in local agricultural production and food imports. Economic, ecological and health considerations are at the heart of the debate but important political, social, cultural and ethical issues are being raised. In its ministry of accompaniment of rural peoples, Agricultural Missions is often requested to provide information, education, guidance and leadership on this issue. The purpose of this statement is to state the position of AMI and provide guidelines to our partners and constituency for consideration in their decision-making processes.

Definitions:
Genetic Engineering (GE) and Genetic Modification (GM) are used interchangeably and refer to the processes and methods by which organisms are genetically altered to exhibit specific qualities or traits deemed desirable. GMOs, as defined in this document, refer to those products resulting from the artificial insertion of genes from one organism into the genes of another, unrelated organism. GMOs are effectively new "engineered" organisms with genetic sequences that could not be achieved under normal conditions. This differs from conventional plant breeding in which genes from related species are combined to create hybrid varieties.

Background:
For the past seven decades Agricultural Missions, has accompanied rural peoples' organizations and social movements advocating for justice, human rights and the economic well being of small-scale farmers, indigenous peoples, and rural communities. Our experiences indicate that technologies that are developed or modified locally, based on indigenous knowledge, are best suited to providing lasting solutions to local problems.

Contrary to expectations, agricultural technologies such as those of the Green Revolution have resulted in the impoverishment and displacement of countless rural poor farmers and their families, increased dependency on chemical fertilizers and pesticides and increased demand on water and other resources. These technologies have effectively increased the concentration of land ownership and wealth of a few at the expense of the majority. Those who can afford the new technologies are more likely to benefit while the poor become increasingly landless and family and community food insecurity also increase.

While recognizing the potential benefits of some forms of genetic engineering in agriculture, there are serious and fundamental questions regarding the long-term risks to human health and the environment that remain unresolved. Many nations, particularly those in the developing world, lack the technical and financial resources as well as the regulatory framework to adequately monitor and control the use of GE products within their borders. Public discourse and education on the issues have not fully taken place, while the promoters of GE products tout the technology as the answer to world hunger.

This only serves to distract society from the critical debate about the underlying systemic economic, social and political causes of hunger and famine.

Agricultural Missions recognizes the biodiversity of the earth as Gods' gift to humanity that must be responsibly used and passed on to future generations. The release of genetically modified organisms in the environment without adequate risk assessment poses a direct threat, through gene drift and genetic contamination, to biodiversity and the integrity of God's creation. Many nations of the global south view GE products as a threat to their food sovereignty because of the potential for genetic contamination of their indigenous crop varieties.

With the support and encouragement of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agriculture, large multinational corporations like Monsanto have monopolized GMO research and development. These corporations have appropriated the research and discoveries of numerous universities in the USA and overseas. By the use of exclusive patents on methods, tools and results of genetic engineering resulting from the use of taxpayer funded efforts; corporate interests have removed these technologies from the public domain, including access by small farmer-based research institutions. Therefore, one of the consequences of patenting of GMOs is that farmers here in the USA as well as overseas are at the mercy of a few multinational corporations which control the availability of GM seeds for basic food crops such as corn and soybeans. This situation is a serious threat to the livelihoods and independence of these farmers, to the food security of their communities and to the sovereignty of their countries. In addition, by promoting the reliance on a narrow range of GM seeds, such policies may also put in jeopardy the global food security of the earth in case of simultaneous crop failures in various parts of the world.

Furthermore, the emphasis on using GM seeds works together with the vision that only large scale mechanized agriculture, using chemical inputs, can provide enough food for the growing world population of the twenty first century. History shows that this is far from being true. The much-touted Green Revolution created more problems in India, Indonesia and the Philippines than it resolved. History shows and experiences demonstrate that small farmers have created and maintained a diversity of food sources with appropriate agricultural practices that have been able to ensure food security of human societies. Problems have generally occurred when monoculture and lack of crop diversification have limited the choices of farmers and restricted their freedom.

The intellectual property rights (IPR) provisions of international trade agreements allow the patenting of the products of genetic engineering. This in effect legalizes the "commodification" and privatization of life forms - resources that were once considered common inheritance of humanity - and negates the centuries of contributions that farmers have made in the selection of crops and animals that form the basis of modern agriculture. Patenting of seeds and animals endows the patent holder with exclusive economic rights that prevents farmers from engaging in the age-old tradition of saving and exchanging seeds, without payment of royalties. Patenting imposes potential economic hardships on the most vulnerable farmers who must purchase patented seeds or pay royalties for each planting.

***Policy Guidelines*:**

Considering the potential and unknown consequences of the use of GE products on the rural poor, particularly small farmers, and based on the above observations, Agricultural Missions:

- Is committed to education and advocacy aimed at understanding the issues, supporting rural communities and churches accessing information and providing opportunities for learning and dialogue;

- Stands in solidarity with rural peoples and farmers who seek to protect their communities and economies and their desire to maintain or reclaim a sustainable system of agricultural production that ensures food security in an environmentally responsible manner;

- Recognizes the centuries of collective human effort to domesticate plants and animals and development of the knowledge of their uses, views these as the common heritage of humanity and opposes the privatization of biological resources and indigenous knowledge;

- Opposes the patenting of living organisms on moral and ethical grounds as a violation of the integrity of God's creation, that is detrimental to the common good and a violation of the rights of farmers to freely save, exchange and replant their seeds, or reproduce the animals they raise;

- Opposes the release of transgenic seeds in the environment until the long-term impacts of such organisms on human health and the environment can be evaluated;

- Calls on ecumenical and secular agencies involved in relief and development to engage in consultation with the intended recipients toward achieving informed decision-making and to respect the wishes of those who refuse food aid containing GMOs and the use of transgenic seeds in development programs;

- Continues to promote the use of indigenous and open pollinated varieties and other appropriate technologies and urges partners, ecumenical and development agencies to do the same;

- Calls on US land-grant colleges and universities to consider the interests of small farmers in their research, to work with small farmer-based agricultural research institutions and to help develop tools that may increase these farmers' efficiencies without tying their hands and putting them at the mercy of GM seeds patented by multinational corporations.