

Guatemala Repeals Law Requiring Use of Genetically Modified Corn Seeds

Kathleen Vitale

The late Horacio Villavicencio was a delightful person to interview. For more than an hour in 2006, he regaled me with



how he had grown commercial cotton in Guatemala since 1947. He switched from white to natural colored cotton around 1990 at the behest of the Museo Ixchel, with subsequent patronage from the museum's Proteje organization.

Villavicencio showed off a plethora of beautiful textiles in his Algodones Mayas store in Antigua. He extolled the solid colors and the perfection of his commercially spun thread, lamented the high cost of getting indigenous women to hand-spin some of his cotton, and blasted the provision in his contract requiring that he return every last culled seed from each crop to Monsanto in the States—a requirement he considered irrational, wasteful, and just plain wrong.

Indigenous natural colored cotton has been grown in Guatemala for more than a thousand years with seeds culled and saved from each crop. A few Maya weavers still grow the plant beside their homes and sell seeds, raw cotton, and hand-spun thread. This indigenous colored cotton is a mottled medium to light brown, never a solid bold color, and never commercially spun due to its short fibers.

Monsanto is a \$14 billion dollar multinational corporation responsible for introducing our world to DDT, Agent Orange,

Roundup, bovine growth hormones, and genetically modified crops. All proceeds revert back to Monsanto and its investors.

It is essential for all of us to make corrections as we go through life. Making mistakes, reevaluating results and making corrections is key to survival. We need to subject our purchase of thread and artisan products to the same scrutiny.

In August/September of 2014 massive protests by labor and indigenous farmers against the use of Monsanto's GMO corn seed shut down Guatemala. Decree 19-2014, known as the "Monsanto Law", was written to comply with the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) requirements and had been passed in June. One portion of the agreement would have given the transnational chemical and seed producer a foot hold into the country's seed market. The law allowed Monsanto an entrance into the Guatemalan seed market and set in place stiff penalties for any farmer that was caught selling seed to another farmer without the proper permits. The response was a massive mobilization of a coalition of labor, indigenous groups, and campesinos. After the protests it was repealed by the country's legislature by a vote of 117 in favor, three against and a whopping 38 abstaining. It remains to be seen whether the repeal can hold out against such powerful interests, or whether the continued use of GMO seed for nonfood crops like cotton will cause similar anger.

In the meantime, let's be sure when we buy artisan products anywhere that the seed source is not GMO, and let's state that on fact labels of products we market.

(Editor's note: more info at <http://tinyurl.com/ptv7ydk> and <http://tinyurl.com/q3c6gr4>)

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Travel Opportunities

Indonesia - Flores, Lembata, Alor, Timor, Savu, Sumba and Rinca - May 19-30, 2016

British textile researchers David and Sue Richardson will be exploring some of the most beautiful islands of Indonesia - Flores, Lembata, Alor, Timor, Savu, Sumba and Rinca - from the comfort of the beautiful schooner Ombak Putih.

Days will be spent exploring weaving villages and learning about natural dyeing techniques, plus time for snorkelling and relaxing on deck. Each evening there will be a talk about the people and textiles we will be encountering the next day.

The trip is limited to 22 participants. Full details can be found at <http://seatrekballi.com/cruise/tribal-weaving-of-the-lesser-sunda-islands/>

