

WHY ARE INDIAN FARMERS DYING, AND WHY SHOULD IT MATTER TO US?

Vandana Shiva believes a shocking wave of suicides is the result of globalisation and the industrialisation of agriculture

The small farmers of India are a most resilient and independent community. They have defended their rights, fought every injustice, and bounced back after every flood, every drought, and every crop failure.

Why, then, are they giving up on life today? Why are they committing suicide in such large numbers? There have been more than 300,000 farmer suicides since 1995, according to official government records. Addressing these questions has become a critical survival imperative – not only for farmers, but also for all of us who rely on the food they put on our tables.

The epidemic of farmers' suicides in India is a result of the haemorrhaging of the agrarian economy by a linear exploitative economy of industrial agriculture, which extracts fertility from the soil, and finances from small farmers, by selling them costly seeds and chemicals and locking them into unfair trade. The result is destruction of ecosystems and farmers' lives as they get trapped in debt.

The epidemic of suicides started after 1995, when agriculture policies were changed under the pressures of WTO agreements. Globalisation added to the debt burden, which was a consequence of the capital-intensive, chemical-intensive industrial agriculture inappropriately called the Green Revolution. In 1984, I carried out a study for the United Nations. I found that the high costs of industrial agriculture had trapped farmers in debt and polluted the soil, depleted the water and destroyed biodiversity. Ecologically it led to the death of the soil due to excessive use of chemical fertilisers.

I discovered four reasons why Indian farming was in crisis:

First, globalisation spread industrial agriculture everywhere. Industrial agriculture operates under the belief that



Farmers are our givers of food

Milled rice, India © Tom Pilston/PANOS