

# Activist, guard killed on Brazil biofarm

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SAO PAULO, Brazil --

Two people were shot dead when activists were confronted by armed men as they invaded a Swiss-owned farm that has been a flashpoint in the debate over biotech crops, authorities and the company said Monday.

A security guard and an activist were killed by gunfire Sunday at the research farm owned by Syngenta AG, a global company with a heavy focus on genetically modified seeds.

The official Agencia Brasil news agency said four activists and four security guards were injured. Details of the clash were still unclear, but the Parana state government said seven guards were arrested, facing possible homicide charges.

Police were standing guard outside the farm Monday to prevent more violence, the state government said in a statement.

Activists, including members of Brazil's Landless Workers Movement and the peasants rights group Via Campesina, shot off fireworks as they entered the farm, and a bus arrived later with gunmen, the Landless Workers Movement said in a statement.

A shootout ensued, though Syngenta's contract with its security company required the guards to be unarmed, Syngenta spokesman Medard Schoenmaeckers said. He described it as "a quite dramatic and violent confrontation where we understand that indeed there were some deadly injuries,"

While Brazil's national government allows use of genetically modified seeds for some crops, Parana's state government recently outlawed genetically modified corn and has tried repeatedly to shut down the Syngenta farm.

Landless Workers Movement spokeswoman Maria Mello said the Syngenta invasion was part of a push to target "multinationals in the agribusiness sector whose presence in Brazil delays the swift implementation of agrarian reform."

The group also wants "to bring an end the evil effects of genetically modified products and their growing presence in Brazil," Mello said.

The landless group, a strong political force in Brazil, uses invasions of private property to pressure the government to redistribute land to the poor. Via Campesina says it represents poor farmworkers and indigenous communities in 56 nations.

About 300 activists first invaded the farm in March 2006, breaking down the gates and setting up tents to publicize their claim that research there into genetically modified soy and corn is illegal.

They stayed until July, when Syngenta won a court order to expel them. The company, Schoenmaeckers said, "never did anything wrong or illegal in Brazil" and is still in the process of deciding the farm's future. He said no Syngenta workers were at the farm when the clash erupted.

Syngenta was created in 2000 when Novartis AG and AstraZeneca PLC merged their agribusinesses. The company's Web site says that 60 percent of its corn and soybean seed has genetically modified traits.

The clash at the Syngenta farm came just days after at least 1,000 Landless Movement activists blocked a railway used to export iron ore from a massive mine complex.