

No headway in GM crops saga as govt rules out go ahead to trials

Federation of Seed Industry of India expresses its disappointment on Minister Prakash Javadekar's response in Rajya Sabha on transgenic crop trials

By **Rahul Koul** - March 26, 2021



Image for representative purpose only!

New Delhi: The future of genetically modified (GM) crops once touted as the future of the agriculture biotechnology sector in India, continues to remain hanging in uncertainty. In a written reply in the Rajya Sabha on March 22, 2021, Minister for Environment Minister and Climate Change, Prakash Javadekar ruled out any direct approval. "It has been decided that proposals for field trials of GM crops, including Bt brinjal, will not be taken up for consideration in the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) without the recommendation of the concerned State/UT Government."

Meanwhile, the Federation of Seed Industry of India has expressed its angst at the continued moratorium and the decision of the union government, hinting that it would hit the industry and also keep India backward in terms of technology adoption.

As per Dr Shivendra Bajaj, Executive Director, Federation of Seed Industry of India for Agri Innovation, "We are disappointed by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change's regressive decision to not go ahead with the Bt Brinjal field trials or any other GM crop trials without considering the recommendations from States and UTs. This further complicates



COVID-19
UPDATE

the already cumbersome process of conducting field trials of transgenic crops in India. As per the regulatory process, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) reviews the data submitted along with the application to conduct field trials and is the only body by law to review the safety of the submitted data and grant final approval of field trials.”

Bajaj says it is not possible for the states to review the data and make decision. “GM crops undergo rigorous safety assessment and conducting scientific research trials is a crucial part of this safety assessment. The proposed process further puts a question mark for science to progress in agricultural biotechnology let alone commercialization and will lead to complete stoppage of GM research in India.”

Ram Kaundinya, Director General, Federation of Seed Industry of India and Alliance for Agri Innovation said, “This will jeopardise the huge investments made by the Indian private sector companies in this space as well as the investments being made by the government through public institutions. Careers of thousands of students studying biotechnology will be finished. If we do not use GM technology, we will also lose opportunities to save water and reduce fertilizer and pesticide consumption. This is a huge set back for science and technology in agriculture. Most importantly it puts the Indian farmer at the grave risk of becoming uncompetitive in the International markets. We need to ensure that farmers in India get access to the same technology that farmers in many other countries enjoy.”

Kaundinya says that the Prime Minister has committed to the doubling of Farmers income and adoption of new innovations is a major component of the strategy to achieving this goal. He urges the government that the science based regulatory process in the country be restored and all applications are assessed in purely scientific and time-based manner.

Rahul Koul

Rahul Koul is a New Delhi-based journalist who writes on a variety of topics related to the life sciences sector. For more than a decade, Rahul has been covering the industry and academia extensively besides contributing to many knowledge reports periodically. While being a qualified biotechnologist, he also has academic credentials in management and journalism. Rahul’s assignments have taken him to different destinations within the country and abroad. He received CyberMedia Person of the Year Award (Quality Media Group Category) for journalism successively in 2010 and 2011.



COVID-19
UPDATE