

Friday, November 19, 2021

MARKETS

## GM crops: Seed companies say NOC rule to seek GEAC nod cumbersome

October 23, 2021

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Domestic seed technology developers have complained that the government has effectively halted field trials of genetically modified (GM) crops in the country via new rule.

The new norm makes a no-objection certificate (NoC) from the state government concerned mandatory to approach the regulator, Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), for permission to conduct the trials.

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“Earlier, the GEAC was approving trial of a GM crop following which companies were approaching state governments for NoC based on that approval for field trials. Now, a company may not have any substantial evidence to seek permission for first stage confined field trials from a state,” said a source. He also drew attention to a recent Karnataka government decision to seek public comments on allowing field trials of GM crops.

In July, [Rallis India](#), a Tata group company, had applied for NoC from the Karnataka government for confined field trials for maize and cotton in one acre, each during 2021-22 and 2022-23 in collaboration with Dharwad and Raichur agriculture universities. But the state government’s apex committee on GM crops decided to put it in public domain for feedback.

“The new rule is an unfortunate development, which will make life very difficult for the already beleaguered agri biotech industry,” said Ram Kaundinya, director general of Federation of Seed Industry of India (FSII). Scientific assessment of technologies should be carried out by scientists through scientific trials and not through public opinion since the public do not have any idea of the technology, he said.

“This will become a political process rather than a science-based process and will practically put the entire agri biotech industry’s efforts and investments on hold. The ultimate sufferer will be the farmer,” Kaundinya said.

Rallis India had sought permission for Bio-safety Research Level 1 (BRL 1) trial to evaluate resistance against *Helicoverpa armigera*, *Spodoptera litura* for cotton and *Spodoptera frugiperda* for maize. Also, the trial was to evaluate tolerance to herbicide glyphosate in both crops, industry sources said.

“Obtaining NoC from states prior to consideration of application by GEAC for permitting BRL1 and BRL 2 trials is a retrogressive and rather counter-productive step. Such trials must be conducted only at the designated sites under the technical supervision of institute monitoring committee,” said R S Paroda, a former director general of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

Pointing that field trials with the consent of state government is not at all justified, Paroda said there is a need to provide enabling environment to scale innovations through scientific experimentation rather than complicating the existing regulatory system.

According to Deepak Pental, former vice-chancellor of Delhi University who had developed a GM mustard variety that was not approved for commercial cultivation, the government should consider a better method than NoC. Pental suggested to

secure environment.

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