

Scientists be allowed to work to reduce agri input cost

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Farmers are facing serious trouble over rising input costs of agriculture and all scientists are of the opinion that it should be reduced. It could be reduced with the help of indigenous science. But for that scientists should be allowed to work, to conduct free trials, according to Dr CD Mayee, chairman, Advisory Council- Agrovision.

He was giving his concluding remarks in an expert panel discussion on 'Modern Tools for Crop Productivity Improvement and Environmental Concerns' organised as a part of the 6th Agrovision that is going on in Nagpur.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Itin Gadkari, chief patron, Agrovision; Minister of Road Transport and Highways; Shipping, stressed the need for looking into how the farm production can be increased using biotechnology. If the oilseeds production is increased by using genetic science it would save large amount of foreign currency, he added.

Earlier in his presentation, Dr Mayee said 65 percent of the Indian agriculture is rainfed. He said Indian scientists have potential of solving agriculture related problems. He quoted an example of how a scientist was trying hard to get permissions for trials of GM seeds. Can guidelines be formed for environmental and health tests, he asked.

Dr Swapan Datta, deputy director general (Seeds), ICAR, said it was a wrong notion that GM crop is narrowing down biodiversity. It is, in fact enriching biodiversity. He also emphasized on investing a lot in genetic diversity and suggested that there should be clear vision on policy. Agriculture has to go to next phase it could not remain in nostalgia, he added.

Similar feelings were expressed by Dr Manvendra Kachore, head of Biotechnology and Biochemistry, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, when he said farming cannot remain as lifestyle living. Today or tomorrow it has to become a profession like a cobblers have turned into. He said the opponents of GM technology are pro-active while proponents are on defensive. When GM technology is being used in other sectors like energy, medicine and healthcare why was it being opposed only in agriculture, he asked.

Dr Krishan Beer Chaudhary, Bharatiya Krishak Samaj, Mr Ashwani Mahajan, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, and Mr Prabhakar Kelkar, secretary, Bhartiya Kisan Sangh, opposed to the GM technology.

Dr Chaudhary said studies on toxicology of GM crop were being done. Giving example of India's export of Basmati rice to Russia, he said Russia asked us if the rice variety was GM and India had to give certify that it was not. In international exports such questions will be asked and answers will have to be given. Do we wish to hand over our food security to only 5 to 6 multi-national companies under the IPR, he asked and said we want technology, but we don't want to compromise, we could not surrender our seeds.

Mr Mahajan said 91 percent of GM products are produced only in four countries and hence it was wrong to say that the whole world is using them then why not India should use it. He said he has not come across a single study that said that GM crops has more productivity. He warned that the companies wanted to do field trials because the next steps was commercial trials. Who has seen the long term impact, he asked.

Mr Kelkar regretted that now the scientific discoveries were being done for companies' benefits instead of for the people's development. He pointed out that Georgia state in US has also banned GM. He said in fact there was need for doing something for 70 percent farmers who were doing dry farming.

Mr Rajendra Barwale, managing director, MAHYCO, said if companies start exploiting farmers as alleged, they would not be able to do long term business. He said farmers want to buy seeds which would give him more yield. Technology has power and science and technology could solve all problems the country was facing.

Prof. C Kameswara Rao, Foundation for Biotechnology Awareness and Education (FABE), expressed confidence that the country's regulatory system was robust and was equal to regulatory system in the world. He said if field trials were stopped then the whole process was stopped in the beginning itself. Listen to scientists and believe in them they have integrity, he said.

Dr KR Kranti, director, Central Cotton Institute of Cotton Research, said that we must address every concern, but let the science be not stopped. Experiments and field trials were needed, he said and added we must remember that no country has progressed without science.

Mr Narayanan Suresh, group editor-BioSpectrum (India & Asia), who moderated the discussion, suggested in his opening remarks to create a separate authority for field trials.

Dr KC Bansal, director, National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources, Dr IS Dua, former chairman, Department of Botany, Panjab University, Chandigarh and ED, Society for Promotion of Science and Technology in India, Dr Arvind Kapur, CEO, Rasi Seeds (P), Dr B Venkateswarlu, vice-chancellor, Vasantrya Naik Marathwada Krishi Vidapeeth,

Dr B Dinesh Kumar of National Institute of Nutrition (ICMR) also spoke. Mr Ravi Boratkar, organising secretary, Agrovision, welcomed the experts.