

Supreme court asks why open field trials of GM crops not be banned

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Supreme court asks why open field trials of GM crops should not be banned



Why there should not be an interim suspension of open field trials of genetically modified crops in view of an expert committee disavouring it? This was the question asked by the Supreme Court on April 22, 2014 to the union government.

According to media reports quoting Press Trust of India, the bench headed by justice HL Dattu observed, "We have reports of responsible persons who occupy responsible positions. Don't you think there should be an interim order (against open field trials) till we hear this case?"

However, the bench, also comprising justice SA Bobde clarified that it was not inclined to halt trial in closed environment or isolated conditions.

The anti-GM activists represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, submitted that open field trials should be banned till a strong regulatory regime was in place.

Mr Bhushan cited the 2012 report of the court-appointed expert committee recommending the ban and the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee to buttress the argument that experts were of the opinion that a moratorium should be imposed on open field trials till regulatory regime was put in place.

However, additional solicitor general Paras Kuhat mentioned that all recommendations of the expert committees were "virtually" in place and the community of Indian and international scientists was in favour of allowing GM crops' field trials.

"We will set the clock at least 10 years back (if field trials are banned). Scientist won't conduct studies in adverse regimes," he reportedly said.

Earlier the apex court in November 2012 had refused to impose an interim ban on their field trials despite the court-appointed expert committee recommending the ban.

In July 2013, the activists had requested the Supreme Court to accept the final report of its technical expert committee while "ignoring" any findings by its member and former DG of Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR), Dr RS Paroda, alleging that he had "conflict of interest" on the issue.

The affidavit filed by activist Aruna Rodrigues, who had sought a complete moratorium on field trial of GMO, had said the final report and documents by the expert committee (TEC) recommended no field trials till regulatory gaps are addressed as there have been serious shortcomings in the GMO regulatory process.