

'GM crop is essential for India'

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What is the current status of GM crop trials?

On receiving the application for field trials we strictly scrutinize safety of trials because safety matters a lot. When we are trying something new, which was not in existence, that must go through the complete safety regime. Therefore after due diligence and successful lab tests applications are considered and allowed for field trials.

After successful commercialization of Bt cotton in India why are other crops not allowed for commercialization as farmers are already growing them in other countries?

About 80 percent farmers have adopted Bt cotton in the country and it is giving results. Finally it is the farmers who are the deciding factors.

On one hand the Ministry of Science and Technology, Agriculture Ministry, and other departments have been supporting biotechnology, fortification of foods. On other side Ministry of Environment and Forest is not allowing field trials of GM crops and not allowing release of the crops. What is the rationale behind such dual action from the government?

We believe that science cannot be stopped. Science must evolve, science must progress and we must not stop experimenting. So our policy is that we continue experimenting with proper safety regime.

Research has to go on and can't be discontinued. We have only 2.5 percent of the world's land mass. We have only one half

of the world's average productivity. We need to increase our productivity as we can't increase our land size. We have to feed to 17 percent of human as well as 17 percent of cattle population of world with 2.5 percent of land. So we have to more efficient, more productive. Therefore GM crop or any other scientific development, which will increase our productivity, is essential for India.

What are the issues involved in GM crops controversy?

Since India is a Federal nation there is freedom for state governments. States can give permission for tests or states cannot allow field trials. At the central level we have given approval/cleared for conducting field trials. What is happening is that no state governments are allowing the field trials. Only three or four trials, which were earlier allowed on agriculture university land, are on. So, practically on ground there are no field trials.

Organizations from both public and private sectors are involved in GM crop research and development including filed trails. Why is the government taking step backwards while allowing them from transfer technology to the private sector?

Currently we have allowed local organizations, who are doing research and want to do trials to conduct field trials. These organizations will not get opportunities elsewhere in the world so they must be provided opportunities.

GEAC has allowed import of GM soybean oil but still the government is not allowing release of GM crops for cultivation?

The world is already using GM soybean oil. There are many products which otherwise also enter our country, because these products are being used by other nations by allowing to be planted, to be grown, to be commercialized and to be exported. The GEAC has allowed import of Soybean oil based on result of safety study and results of the trials. As of now we have received only one application for commercialization of mustard after successfully conducting safety tests and lab trials.

At the same time we have to decide about our priorities also. Our priority has to be and is oilseeds and pulses, because that is what will be in short supply.

Only few countries have given approval for commercial cultivation of GM crops. Soybean is oilseed but soybean trial has not been fructified till and there is no application for commercialisation of GM soybean.