

Jairam Ramesh does it again, curses GM crops as a ploy to monopolize agriculture

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While speaking recently at an event to launch 'Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition', the rural development minister, Jairam Ramesh warned against opting for genetically modified (GM) food crops in the name of providing better nutrition.

"The step from recognising the importance of agriculture in nutrition to making a case for genetically engineered GM crops is a very small step. Because it is very mesmerising and very seductive to have rice which is fortified with vitamin A, a wheat which is fortified with iron and all the wonderful things that have come out with through transgenetic techniques," he added while speaking at the vent held in New Delhi.

Ramesh, who as environment minister oversaw a massive public consultation on genetically modified or Bt Brinjal, mentioned that while the first green revolution which was publicly funded and delivered saw the wheat and rice varieties coming from Cimmyt in Mexico and Iri in Philippines respectively, today's crop varieties are not coming from Monsanto and Syngenta - the two major sponsors of GM foods. It was during his stint as environment minister in 2010, that a moratorium on Bt Brinjal. His move was well lauded by the environmental activists and those against the GM crops. However, he has been equally criticized by top scientists and his colleagues within the government for over-ruling the scientific fraternity.

The comments from Ramesh have come at a time when come the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), the

statutory body on genetically modified crops, recently allowed field trials for four food crops-- genetically modified rice, wheat, maize and castor. However it was said that the the minutes of the relevant GEAC meeting which were inadvertently put on the GEAC site were not approved by the environment ministry and therefore take off later.

Also, the ministry, which has the final say put the decision on hold in wake of the ongoing case in the Supreme Court on GM crops. The hearing in that case is expected to happen today on July 2, 2013. With the strategies drawn and argument ready on both sides, it would be interesting to see what the court decides to do.