

Dr Shiva starts online petition against GM Mustard

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In an anticipatory reaction to the approval of GM Mustard by the environment ministry, Dr Vandana Shiva, a known fierce critic of GM crops has started a online petition against it. Her petition on Change.Org, the online platform to draw attention of government mentions, "This 'new' mustard in our kitchen could soon be harmful to us. Mustard oil is an everyday consumption item for lakhs of families across India. Almost all our curries are incomplete without a seasoning of mustard and mustard products find their way into our food in various ways. Don't we have babies massaged with mustard oil? Have we not enjoyed Sarson da Saag on cold winter days?"

Going into details, the petition says, "And now our mustard is getting Genetically Modified. Shockingly, important information about this new GM mustard is not being disclosed to us. The government regulators are planning to meet soon and take a decision on permitting GM mustard to be cultivated across the country. If approved, GM mustard will be the first GM food on our plates and that's disturbing."

The petition argues that the GM Mustard is totally unnecessary especially because there are existing local and hybrid varieties as well as farm practices which give as much or more than the yield claims of this dangerous GM mustard. Dr Shiva exhorted people to ask environment minister, Mr Prakash Javadekar to stop the possible approval of commercial cultivation of GM Mustard.

"Several studies show that GM food is not safe for us. Indian government is aware of such studies. Many people have pointed to the dangers of GM food including experts and even the Technical expert committee set up by the Supreme Court itself. Despite these warnings, GM Mustard is now going to be released in India. However no data has been released about its safety tests. Nor has information been put out on what went into making this GM mustard. This includes the fact that new genes for male sterility and tolerance towards weed-killing chemicals called herbicides have been used to make this GM mustard. The herbicides in question are associated with big MNCs like Bayer," stated the petition.

Dr Shiva through her petition asked environment minister, Mr Prakash Javadekar to ensure no commercial cultivation of GM Mustard is permitted and release all data about the GM Mustard safety tests.

When asked about the petition, an industry expert termed it a useless activity. "Even before the approval, a mass hysteria is being tried to be whipped up. Though everybody has a right to their opinion but it should not be based on their personal grudges and prejudices. GM Mustard has been tested for a long time and government will go by the data produced by scientists," he stated.