

Battle over GM moratorium continues

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The entire operations of the regulatory agencies, the research activities on GM crops and in turn the need of the country to realize the potential benefit of modern biotechnology in terms of food security would come to a virtual halt, if field trials of GM crops are stopped in the country. This is what, according to sources, the union ministry of agriculture has mentioned in its action taken report, which was submitted to the panel in November 2012.

Noting that the field trails are integral part of research and development, the ministry has mentioned in the report that the biosafety research cannot be conducted in glass house as safety efficacy and the performance of GM crops would vary depending upon host environment, host crop and inserted gene. In the backdrop of the report, the union minister for agriculture, Mr Sharad Pawar had recently mentioned to media that the research on GM crops and their field trials should continue in a country such as ours, which has huge population. He also however said that caution should be exercised while allowing GM crops for commercial cultivation.

Earlier, the panel headed by the member of parliament, Mr Basudeb Acharya had recommended the government to stop all open-field trials of transgenic crops until it develops a better system of monitoring and oversight. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court too had earlier refused to halt the field trials of the GM crops recommended by the technical expert committee (TEC), seeking a 10-year moratorium on field trials on GM crops. Taking note of the objections against the report, a Bench of Justices Mr Swatanter Kumar and Mr SJ Mukhopadaya on November 9, 2012 had refused to stay the ban of field trials and directed that all the objections be placed before the TEC for fresh consideration and asked the committee to submit its report in six weeks.

With all the stakeholders ready to battle it out in the court and the final report of TEC being awaited eagerly, all eyes are set on the highest judicial authority for the final decision on GM crops.