

3 GM crops are under field trials: Ms Jayanthi Natarajan

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Out of 20 genetically modified (GM) crops approved by Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), three crops such as transgenic cotton, corn and mustard received No Objection Certification (NOC) from state governments nod for conducting field trials in the country.

Sharing this information Ms Jayanthi Natarajan, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment and Forests, government of India in the Rajya Sabha in a written reply to a question by Mr K N Balagopal, she said, "The Government has allowed field trial of GM plants in Agriculture sector in India. The GEAC, an apex body notified under Rules 1989 has approved experimental field trials for the purpose of biosafety research and event selection in respect of GM crops such as cotton, rice, tomato, groundnut, potato, corn, sorghum, okra, brinjal, mustard, wheat, watermelon, papaya, sugarcane, rubber, castor, banana, pigeon pea, *Artemisia annua* L. and Chickpea."

She further said, "In respect of other crops, NOC from the State Governments are awaited. Currently there are no ongoing field trials with GM crops. The Government of India is following a policy of case by case approval of GM crops. In view of various concerns related to the safety, efficacy and agronomic performance of transgenic seeds, extensive evaluation and regulatory approval process takes place before any GM plant is approved for commercial cultivation. This includes generation of relevant biosafety information and its elaborate analysis to ensure food, feed and environmental safety. The environmental safety assessment includes studies on pollen escape out- crossing, aggressiveness and weediness, effect of the gene on non-target organisms, presence of protein in soil and its effect on soil micro-flora, confirmation of the absence of terminator gene and baseline susceptibility studies. The food and feed safety studies include assessment on composition analysis, allergenicity and toxicological studies and feeding studies on fish, chicken, cows and buffaloes."

"In case, the transgenic crop is not found suitable for release in the environment or human consumption, the product is rejected during the trial stage itself. A final view on the commercialization of GM plants is taken only when there is a clear economic and technical justification for release of the product," the Minister added.