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The last kharif season saw no clarity on the sowing of GM seeds due to lack of political will on the part of the government. This made the agri-biotech companies who were allowed to hold the confined trials after no objection certificate from the states by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) to keep their fingers crossed. During its last meeting held one year ago on March 2013, GEAC had given green signal for the field trials of as many as crops but was withheld by the then environment minister, Ms Jayanthi Natarajan.

However, after the prime minister asked her to go, the new environment minister Mr Veerappa Moily took few immediate decisions on some pending issues. Within two months of his joining, Moily has finally on February 27, 2014 approved the March, 2013 decision of the GEAC to allow more than 200 successful gene modification trials for rice, wheat, maize, castor and cotton. The minister has also called a meeting of the GEAC on March 21, 2014, a year after it last met and cleared the field trials.

In its last meeting, GEAC had given Bayer Bioscience an open-ended clearance to test GM rice in all four regions of the country after consent of state governments. It gave permission to Bayer to conduct selection trials on 45 transgenic rice events, comprising six genes. Mahyco and BASF India were allowed to conduct trials of GM rice while Hyderabad-based Directorate of Oilseeds Research's GM castor had been re-approved for field trails. Monsanto India was permitted to test its GM maize at alternate sites after facing protests in several states. Similarly, Mahyco was also given an extended clearance for GM wheat trials. Apart from that, the GEAC had also cleared field testing of various GM cotton varieties by Bayer, BASF and Mahyco.

The biotech industry body, Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises- Agriculture Group (ABLE-AG) also welcomed the positive attitude of the new environment minister. Mr Ram Kaundinya, chairman, ABLE AG added, "It is encouraging that the minister has approved the March,2013 decision of GEAC. This is a progressive step and will clear the path for the unhindered progress of R&D in the vital agriculture sector."

"ABLE-AG firmly believes that research and trials in GM technology should not be stopped as additional information from research and trials will help us to assess the technology more accurately. it was very discouraging that the GEAC mechanism had come to a half for the last two years," mentioned the statement from ABLE AG.

Prior to that even prime minister had openly batted for the GM crops. While speaking at the Indian Science Congress held at Jammu, Dr Manmohan Singh had asked the scientists to communicate their ideas in a much vocal manner. "To ensure food security and to improve land and water productivity, we have to launch a national drive for an ever-green revolution. This will test the ingenuity of our agricultural scientists. Climate-resilient agriculture and modern bio-technological tools hold great promise. Use of bio-technology has great potential to improve yields", said Dr Singh.