

GM crops get GEAC nod, ABLE-AG calls it a progressive push

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Finally, the much awaited meeting of GEAC took place on March 21, 2014. The 118th meeting of the committee has happened after an year due to the non seriousness shown by the previous minister on the issue (It met in March last year). It is being said that the pressure of Mr Veerapa Moily who took over as the environment minister few months back, has made it happen despite the opposition from activists.

The committee during the latest meeting under the chairmanship of Mr Hem Pande, secretary, environment ministry has cleared 11 cases which were pending for revalidation including the varieties of the GM wheat, rice, maize and cotton. These crops had been approved for confined trails few years back but were held back because the companies could not get approval from the respective state governments.

However, the multi-national companies like Monsanto, Mahyco and BASF whose applications got revalidation, will be able to go for field trials only after getting the state's mandatory nod.

The unofficial reports suggest that the GEAC is all set to meet again on April 25, 2014 to take up the other 70 cases for the clearances. The committee is yet to put up any official communication in this regard.

Meanwhile, the Association of Biotechnology led Enterprises (ABLE-AG) has welcomed the decision.

"We welcome this and hope that the rest of the applications too shall be expeditiously cleared," said Mr Ram Kaundinya, Chairman, ABLE-AG.

Dr N Seetharama, Director ABLE-AG said, "Such progressive decisions pave the way for the continuation of R&D in agri biotech, so critical for the benefits of technology to percolate to farmers."

"We laud the Government's reaffirmation of faith in the power of technology. At a time when agriculture is under severe stress and requires immediate infusion of technology and innovation, we can't afford to ignore biotechnology which has a proven track record of enhancing crop yields in a safe and sustainable way the world over", he added.

At the saem time, the activists are not taking this kindly. The coalition for GM Free India as well as Greenpeace India had earlier requested the ministry not to take any decision on field trials of GM crops unless the Supreme Court takes its final call on the matter. The apex court is scheduled to hear the matter on April 14.