

“Shouldn't be disheartened as GM will take time”

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Q: How do you look at the debate around GM crops now? Has the scenario changed in the last few years?

Dr Datta: We lost a decade. There is a negative environment in GM research. People started moving to MAS and other techniques as they were reluctant to do it due to controversies surrounding it. But the fact is that a biotech plant cannot be without *Arabidopsis thaliana*. A plant biotech product has to be commercialized. Public institutes have to do better valued research than 20 years back. Improvement is required. We failed to understand actual biotech research. GM will take time and we should not be disheartened.

Q: What about the criticism on Bt Cotton? Couldn't Bt Brinjal have been a success also?

Bt cotton is a successful example. However, it was an illegal crop legalized later. Perhaps Bt crop will face the same. Bt Brinjal was almost approved but a single minister halted it. He overstepped his role and side-lined GEAC decision. It is growing well in Bangladesh now.

Q: Don't you think biodiversity is an important aspect that requires to be taken care of? Why do activists cry foul over the issue?

Biotech is an extension of plant breeding. In the threat of climatic changes, lies the opportunity for biologists. There are 4 lakh germplasms at NIPGR which perhaps would be never utilized. Biodiversity has to be understood in the proper perspective. Activists don't understand the importance. It hurts as a biologist that only one aspect of biodiversity is being talked about. We have to understand the importance as scientists. Twenty two thousand wheat germplasms are being analyzed. The exports are up as during 2013-14, 23 billion dollars worth food has been exported. 10 million tonnes of rice and 4.6 billion dollars worth basmati alone has been exported. From an importing country, we have become an exporting nation.

Activists haven't understood the GM fully. Its benefit is going to the farmers and the people who brought it to the commercial

angle. We have to see whether GM is safe or not for the people.

Q: What is your opinion on the Open Access Policy implemented by ICAR? How successful has it been so far?

Access to journals and the suggestions from public have increased since the open access policy at ICAR. The information about new varieties developed, technological interventions, government funding have benefitted the farmers and researchers alike to increase the yield. This is a huge country with variable agriculture policies at the state level. It is important to keep the federal policies in alignment with the foresight on agricultural methods in next 11-15 years. As PM Modi had mentioned, there is need to bring awareness to farmers. Besides that I feel the IP policy and profit sharing is important. It has not been practised in India so far. Therefore, it is important to keep the guidelines clear while implementing the open access policies.