

Scrapping GM would be death knell for biotech policy: ABLE-AG

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As per ABLE-AG, the biotechnology applications in agriculture should be a part of the package of solutions that address the economic and social needs of a growing population.

Arguing in favor of genetically modified (GM) plants, the premier agriculture-biotech association has stated that the GM regulatory process in the country is defined by 1989 of EPA, 1986 and is one of the best in the world. It has wondered how the approval of GM crops is not acceptable while GM medicines and vaccines approved by the same GEAC are fine for the population of this country. "Every technology evolves over a period of time. Research is an essential part of the evolution of technology. We need to use new technologies as they keep evolving instead of waiting eternally. A country like India which has a high priority on increasing agricultural productivity and alleviating rural poverty cannot afford to ignore beneficial technologies"

ABLE-AG believes that the issue of patenting seeds is misplaced. In the note prepared by the association, it has explained, "Indian Patent Act does not provide patents on plants and plant parts including seeds. Seeds are not patented. We have to differentiate between seeds and biotech traits. Seeds are carriers of traits, much like how computers carry a chip. The companies who develop seeds through their own research protect them under the Plant Variety Protection Act, 2002. Under this Act, the farmer has all the freedom to save the seed and reuse it. The Government has full rights to intervene if any particular seed is demanded and the company is not making it available. There are enough safeguards in the Act. The biotech traits are patentable under the Patents Act. But it will not cause any food security issues as the seeds are available, irrespective of the biotech trait. As mentioned earlier, the biotech trait is given only once to the seed company through a donor seed and it is an irreversible process. We have to note that the seed is not imported. All the Bt cotton seeds are produced in India."

The long 15 point strong note by the ABLE-AG has asked few straight questions. If there should be a social debate before the introduction of every technology that affects the people then what about various other technologies which are being used by urban people?, asks the note and further seeks answers on Why only single out technologies which are helping 60 percent of our population who are dependent on agriculture? Why only single out technologies which are aimed at reducing the back

breaking drudgery of our farmers? It will be a good idea for the Government to create a platform of multi-stakeholders where data-based and scientific assessment debate can take place on important technological interventions in our country.