

Agri-experts remind government of decisive policy on GM

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"It is hysterical situation that even the trials are not being allowed. If government funds a project worth crores and withdraws its approval to product outcome, then it makes no sense in supporting it in first instance" mentioned Dr Deepak Pental former vice chancellor, Delhi University at a roundtable discussion organized by Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises-Agriculture Group (ABLE-AG) at Delhi on 04 February, 2015.

Dr Pental who is also an expert and professor of genetics told BioSpectrum, "It is important to note that 47 percent of Indian population is still dependent on agriculture (small holding farmers). Prosperity of India depends on the prosperity of the Indian farmers. It is calculated that it will still be at 42 percent by 2032. While it is claimed that enough allocations are made for agriculture, the truth is that 95 percent of funds go into salaries and not in actual research." He feels that activists should also study the effects of pesticide usage and rather pursue other grave health issues such as chewing of tobacco and ghutkha.

As per international agri-biotech consultant, Dr Shanthu Shanthram, the complete politicization has happened in India since Jairam put a moratorium on it. Dr Shantharam who is also a visiting professor at the Iowa State University added further, "Policy can't be decided on streets. Although new government has been positive, outcome is yet to be seen. There is what I call 'muti-million protest industry' thriving on the issue. Technology has been held hostage."

And there are comparisons with other countries on policy as well. "Canada is an example as it is one country which is never aggressive like US as alleged. But it has got 7.7 million hectares under GM crop cultivation. We either follow Europe or Japan and be among GM importing nations or like Canada develop it keeping our population in consideration. Indians can't afford to be foolish to reject technology where crores of tax payers' money has already been invested to improve agriculture. If there is a solution through conventional breeding let it be! But now decision has to be taken," said a scientist who works with a premier agri institute.

The ABLE-AG has urged the government to look into the issues faced by the agri-biotechnology entrepreneurs and companies. It has called for a constructive dialogue among stakeholders to resolve differences.