

Farmer groups hail government decision on field trials of GM crops

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National Farmers' Empowerment Initiative (NFEI), an umbrella organization representing many farmer organizations across the country, has complimented prime minister, Mr Narendra Modi for taking the very progressive decision of allowing field trials of GM crops. Hailing this decision as progressive and long overdue, president of NFEI and Punjab farmer, Mr PPS Pangli termed the judgment as an affirmative reiteration of Modi Government to ensure that benefits of progressive technology reach country's farmers.

The ministry of environment and forest (MoEF) had on July 18, cleared field trials for 15 GM crops which include major crops such as rice, chickpea and brinjal among others. The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) under the MoEF took up the proposals for field trials which have been pending for over one year. The committee had not met between March 2013 and March 2014.

"R&D is integral to the infusion of modern technology in agriculture. Unfortunately, the decision on field trials had become a victim of political interference and insensitivity of the UPA Government towards farmers", said Bihar farmer and president of Pragatisheel Krishi Manch, Mr Kishore Jaiswal. The manch works with farmers across Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha and UP.

He further added, as per a global report, more than 18 million farmers in 27 countries planted biotech crops in 2013, reflecting a five million, or 3 percent, increase in global biotech crop hectarage. In the present scenario, R&D activities of both the public and private sectors have been put on hold since 2010, causing enormous delay in making these technologies available to farmers, he said.

"Trait development through Genetic Modification is at various stages of research, being conducted in more than 9 crops and 50 events in various parts of the country. More than 50 percent of these research projects are in public institutions where hundreds of crores has been invested by the Government," said Mr S Jaipal Reddy of Pratap Rudra Farmers Society, Warangal.

National award winning farmer and leader, Mr Sudhanshu Kumar added, "India has adequate safeguards in bio-safety and

food safety already built into the existing system. Only after thorough testing at different stages with great care and regulatory oversight, GM crops are authorized for commercial cultivation. Field trials form a part of this process, to ensure that the efficacy of the genetically modified seeds are scientifically evaluated and data is generated which helps us understand the efficacy and the utility."