

GM Crops need no regulations much like conventional farming: Montagu

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"Genetically Modified (GM) crops need no regulations as conventional farming and to feed 1.2 billion people in India biotechnology cannot be ignored, Prof Marc Van Montagu, Founder & Chairman, Institute for Plant Biotechnology Outreach, Ghent University, Belgium said last week at Delhi.

Delivering the keynote address at inaugural session of the Krishi 21- Conference on Sustainable Greener Agriculture- at National Bureau for Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) here Montagu said, "India needs GM crops and if we do not need regulations for conventional farming, I do not think these GM varieties need any regulations. Nature is a big genetic laboratory and we should accept it."

The two-day Krishi 21 Conference on "Agricultural Transformation toward Greener Economy" organized by Green Agri Miles saw several prominent scientists deliberating about green agriculture and economy. Prof RB Singh, Chancellor, Central Agriculture University and Chairman of the Conference briefed about the theme. "Private sector is serving humanity in a big way. We should have a Public Private Partnership (PPP) for biotechnology. Science is not liberated in India to serve society," he said. "The country needs to enhance productivity by 40% to meet the growing need of food and green agriculture has to be nitrogen, water and energy smart," Singh added.

Prof Montagu emphasized that scientists need to understand the need of society and they will have to step out from their laboratories to convince people about the wonders science and especially biotechnology can bring in agriculture. Prof

Montagu has founded the Institute of Plant Biotechnology Outreach (IPBO) with the mission to assist developing countries in gaining access to the latest plant biotechnology developments and to stimulate their research institutions to become independent and competitive.

"The new innovations can transform agriculture to meet the requirements of food and feed of the world. Enormous future awaits agriculture and with best of science including molecular biology, target of feeding 1.2 billion in India would not be an unachievable task," Montagu added.

The World Food Prize laureate highlighted the various sustainable solutions for the pressing food security problems of the future. To meet this, we should embrace a realistic approach that seeks to answer what science can do and what society wants, he added. "We need a realistic approach towards GMOs (GM crops and GM food) as well. We need to tell society about benefits and safeguards. It would be wrong to believe that scientists are not concerned about agro-ecology and biodiversity. Therefore, I firmly believe that sustainable intensification is the way out for future," Montagu pointed out.

Prof HS Gupta, Director IARI said, "India has achieved great success in food sufficiency both with the help of GM and non-GM crops. We now need to diversify in other sectors like horticulture and animal feed. Food diversification can help the country both in production and management of crops." Mr Prabhakar Rao, CMD, NSL emphasized on scaling up the best agronomy practices to meet future requirements and to give boost to these practices across the country, adequate policy support would be required.

Mr Ajay Vir Jhakar, Chairman, Bharat Krishak Samaj said that regulating big business in India is a major challenge. "We need technology for greener economy. We are not allowing our scientists to do more research in biotechnology. China spends Rs 13,000 on biotech research and India hardly spends Rs 100 crore. Thus we are ignoring scientific knowledge which can revolutionize our agriculture," he said. The experts deliberated on subjects such as "Greening Agriculture toward Green Economy," "Technologies, Innovations and inputs for Sustainable Development" during the two separate session on the first day of the Conference. Besides scientists, senior officials of public and private sector also participated in the discussion.