

Industry welcomes anti-GM activist Lynas turnaround

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Industry welcomes anti-GM activist Mark Lynas turnaround on GM crops



"So my message to the anti-GM lobby, from the ranks of the British aristocrats and celebrity chefs to the US foodies to the peasant groups is this. You are entitled to your views. But you must know by now that they are not supported by science. We are coming to a crunch point, and for the sake of both people and the planet, now is the time for you to get out of the way and let the rest of us get on with feeding the world sustainably," spoke the celebrated anti-GM activist, Mark Lynas at an Oxford University conference in January, reversing his opposition to GM crops.

In more than a month, the anti and pro-GM groups have been discussing the turnaround which has stunned the world. " His support from being a staunch opponent of GM crops is a morale booster," said a bioagri company representative during the Bangalore India Bio conference on February 5 in Bangalore.

Leading biotechnologist Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw came out openly in favour of GM crops at the conference. She in fact said the anti-science policy that banned Bt brinjal, approved by the regulator, is a dampener. Mazumdar-Shaw if the government allows GM technologies to flourish, this segment alone could contribute a fourth of the \$100 billion revenue target the industry has set for itself for the year 2025 from the current year's \$ 5 billion.

She highlighted the fact that India has become a net exporter of cotton, thanks to the introduction of Bt cotton within a decade. And the value of Bt cotton last year was close to \$ 4 billion.

Lynas, the author of *The God Species: How the Planet Can Survive the Age of Humans*, published in July 2011, has been a major supporter of Greenpeace, the NGO staunchly opposed to genetically modified(GM) crops and has participated in several high profile anti-GM campaigns.

"I am sorry that I helped to start the anti-GM movement back in the mid-1990s and that I thereby assisted in demonising an important technological option which can be used to benefit the environment," Lynas said in his Oxford lecture. " I had assumed that GM was dangerous. It turned out that it was safer and more precise than conventional breeding using mutagenesis for example; GM just moves a couple genes, whereas conventional breeding mucks about with the entire genome in a trial and error way."

BioAgri companies have got a boost from the turnaround by one of its most vocal opponents and are planning to launch campaigns to create public opinion favourable to GM technologies.

The full text of Mark Lynas' speech can be accessed at <http://www.marklynas.org/2013/01/lecture-to-oxford-farming-conference-3-January-2013/>