

GM is a key part of technological intervention for food governance, agree experts

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While advanced technologies can provide much of the solutions for improved production and sustainability, the debate about use of such technologies to meet our future food requirements has reached a deadlock for long. Therefore, as a part of its initiative to provide a platform for dialogue and deliberation Governance Now magazine, organized the conference titled 'Future of food governance: role of technology for food security' in New Delhi on November 07, 2013.

The event was aimed at triggering a discussion on issues like whether the country can produce enough food without any help from genetic engineering and can India forever ignore technology intervention in agriculture. The meeting was in the background of the fact that in all the debates over GM, there is common ground. And there is a common intent of both sides to have the food security for the future generation.

Present on the occasion as the special guest was, Mr Dalip Singh, additional secretary, ministry of agriculture, government of India. The guest of honour was Dr R B Singh, president, NAAS.

In his address, Dr R B Singh noted that GDP rate has slipped to 5% from 8-9% in the recent years. He expressed his dismay over the growing rigid gap between rich and poor. He commented further, "40% of the mal-nutritioned children are in India. Therefore, food bill has to reach out to poorest of poor."

"The genetically modified (GM) technologies have been a point of different perspectives and debates. Different ministries hold divergent opinions on the issue. But the prime minister's opinion on the issue has been clear that liberation of science is important for the human society as the hunger of a child can't wait," said Dr Singh on the GM debate.

Mr Dilip Singh agreed that there are various issues at multiple levels. However, he seemed to differ in the production of food grains as the primary issue. Elaborating further, he said, "The public distribution system is the main challenge at the moment. Another is the lack of crop diversification and capacity building for the government." Taking further on information and communication in agriculture, he stated further, "The use of ATMA, a model of extension for enabling proper agri technologies for ensuring food security, will help in the longer run."

In his keynote address, Mr Tariq Anwar, minister of state for agriculture and food processing, was hopeful that soon the technologies beneficial for the country will get acceptance from all the sections of the society. "We are unable to derive full benefits of the technologies so far. Biotech is expected to play a great role in the crop improvement. This issue needs to be debated as the issue has been contentious across globe. Technical committee requires to be constituted in a proper way. Robust system required for scientific," said the minister. Anwar further admitted that there certainly are loopholes in the governance. "Something is seriously wrong with how the system operates," he said.

Earlier Mr B V Rao, editor, Governance Now, in his speech welcomed the discussions and mentioned that all the stakeholders must repeatedly enter into dialogue with each other to resolve the issue in a amia

This was followed by a panel discussion on 'Role of Technology in Food Security'. Among other panelists were Dr J S Sandhu, Agriculture Commissioner, Ministry of Agriculture; Dr S R Rao, Advisor, Department of Biotechnology, Govt of India; Mr. Sanjeev Gupta, Jt Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Govt of India; Prof Deepak Pental, Delhi University; Prof N Chandrashekhara Rao, Institute of Economic Growth; Mr Ajay Vir Jakhra, Chairman, Bharat Krishak Samaj.

Few of the issues that were explored through discussions included India's agriculture challenges, food for future: sustainable options, role technology in food security, regulatory uncertainty and industry's concerns, germplasm exchanges and IPR, choices for the farmers and all others in food value chains, health and environment concerns and role of governance and decision making on all above issues.

Dr N Seetharama, executive director, Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises (ABLE-AG) in his thanking speech emphasized that the technology dissemination is very important. "GEAC issue requires to be sorted out as soon as possible as its defunct status is a major concern for whole agri-biotech sector."