

Accelerate genetic engineering technology, farmers urge Javadekar

IANS Thursday 4th June, 2015

An association of farmers on Thursday urged union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar to accelerate genetic engineering technology for farmers and agriculture and make it a priority focus area to help combat disease, pests and climate change challenges.

The Confederation of NGOs of Rural India (CNRI), an association of NGOs representing 7,000 NGOs and two lakh self-help-groups across India, said that 3,000 farmers across 10 key agriculture states told it that genetic engineering technology is essential to mitigate after-effects of climate change.

CNRI said that through its partners, it recently engaged with over 3,000 farmers across Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Punjab, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka to seek their inputs on issues of climate change and its effect on agriculture.

The results were collated primarily from Kharif, Rabi and Zaid growing regions across these 10 states, it said.

It said that in addition to lack of irrigation and limited access to bank credit, the biggest concern expressed by farmers was the lack of quality seeds as per the multi-agro climatic zones and usage of breeding technologies.

CNRI said that there were biotechnology applications to combat climate change - primarily drought, unseasonal rains and increasing soil salinity in semi-arid and arid regions.

In addition to climate change, farmers also felt that the increasing incidence of pests is also adversely affecting farming and posing a threat to incomes, it said.

It said that in addition to lack of irrigation and limited access to bank credit, the biggest concern expressed by farmers was the lack of quality seeds as per the multi-agro climatic zones and usage of breeding technologies.

CNRI said that there were biotechnology applications to combat climate change - primarily drought, unseasonal rains and increasing soil salinity in semi-arid and arid regions.

In addition to climate change, farmers also felt that the increasing incidence of pests is also adversely affecting farming and posing a threat to incomes, it said.

"Citing the example of how Bt Cotton lifted millions of farmers from abject poverty and also transformed the socio economic status of cotton farmers in India so far, farmers are now demanding the same technology be made available for other edible food items like pulses, vegetables and cash crops like oil seeds, maize and soya," said CNRI in a statement.

It said that it found that farmers across these 10 states were keen to ask the government to accelerate the development of seeds through new breeding techniques which can be achieved through agriculture biotechnology applications.

Highlighting the findings, CNRI's national president Raghupati Singh said: "The Indian farmer needs technological help to combat the ill-effects of climate change. Indian farmers want the success of Bt cotton replicated with other crops and have them genetically modified to combat the ill-effects of climate change."

"The application of genetic engineering in agriculture will lead to higher yields and assured supply and result in consumers benefitting through reduced or stable prices for agricultural products," he added.