



After GM crops, agri dept eyes biofertilisers to increase yield

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EVEN as the state government turned down the request to conduct field trials of genetically modified (GM) crops, also known as Bt crops, the state agriculture department is going to promote biofertilisers instead for increasing production of food and other crops.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, State Agriculture Minister Babubhai Bokhiria said that the government had decided to encourage commercial production of "biofertiliser consortium" that has been developed by microbiologists R V Vyas and Harsha Shelat of the Anand Agriculture University (AAU). He said that the university had signed a memorandum of understanding with two companies and given them licenses for commercial production.

According to Bokhiria, the liquid biofertiliser, which increases yield by 25 to 40 percent, would be introduced to farmers at the "Winter Krishi Mahotsava" at Bhavnagar on December 14. It will considerably bring down the cost of

chemical fertiliser currently used by farmers. He said that they were 100% natural and do not cause any harm to the health of soil, human beings or to the environment, he said.

The new liquid biofertiliser formed from a particular strain of bacteria found in the mines near Pavagadh help break phosphates and phosphorus present in the soil and make it available to the plant. It also helps soil absorb atmospheric nitrogen and make it available to the plants. A senior official of AAU said the department of microbiology had also got it patented so that no one else could copy it and lay claim to the innovation. The official said that the product was tested at the fields of more than 15 lakh farmers in the state before applying for the patent.

The official said the new fertiliser was different from existing ones in the sense that all existing ones have only one microbe and don't make ingredients available to plants. Scientists in the AAU's microbiology department said the it could bring huge profit to the farmers growing organic food by exporting it to other countries.