



## Experts call for govt push for GM trials

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**T**HE Indian Science Congress on Monday saw experts from the field of biotechnology point out why India needed to use the Genetic Modification (GM) technology in agriculture. Lamenting the lack of a clear signal from the government on the issue of GM trials, the scientists said the government's stand is leaving biotechnology researchers in the country disillusioned.

Citing how India imports largely transgenetic oilseed to the tune of Rs 65,000 crore each year and how trans-genetically produced oleic mustard in Indian labs has shown better nutrition value than olive oil, the experts urged delegates at the Congress to use science and technology to better food security.

Interestingly, the gathering had no speakers to point out the possible side-effects of

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**THE gathering had no speakers to point out the possible side-effects of using GM crops on the soil**

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using GM crops on the soil, regular crops or GM contamination. Deepak Pental from the Department of Genetics, Delhi University, said the Genetic Modification technology is a scientific issue that has been hijacked by the neo-left and far-right groups. He added that it is not stuck because of lack of knowledge and expertise in the country.

“What kind of ‘swadeshi’ are our nationalists propagating if they don’t even encourage confined field trials, let alone allow release of thoroughly tested Genetically-modified crops?,” Pental said.

He added that Barnase/barstar transgenics for hybrid seed production of mus-

tard has been in use abroad since 1996. “But in India we are still wondering if we should release it,” he said, adding that his team has developed a BT cotton crop that is more drought-resistant and will submit it to the Punjab Agricultural University for further study.

Anupam Verma, senior scientist at New Delhi-based Indian Agriculture Research Institute, tried to dispel ‘myths’ about GM crops by stating that organic farming and traditional farming methods alone cannot increase yield.

“If organic farming alone could solve problems, no one would have looked at genetic modification. Organic farming is not going to give you 30-40 per cent higher yield. For 18 years, people have been consuming GM produce, no credible study has found proof of problems,” said Verma. “For ten years with Bt cotton and Bt mustard, we have a goldmine sitting with us, and yet we import oilseed,” he added.