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## Farmers Enumerate Benefits of Bt Cotton

by Papiya Bhattacharya

**Bengaluru:** The debate over genetically modified crops bears its head every year and then, but for many farmers, it is an open-and-shut case.

Take the example of Basavaraj P. Rudagi and Kallanagouda Patil, of villages in Dhariwad taluqa near Uppinabete. Basavaraj grows cotton on 15 acres of land, 10 acres he uses, while Kallanagouda grows the crop on 10 acres. Both of them say Bt cotton has almost doubled their yield

and reduced the investment on pesticides and labour.

According to experts, debates on GM crops are often riddled with ill-informed remarks about the risks of such crops. Genetic modification is a technology that cannot be ignored and may come handy to feed the 9 billion people expected to populate the planet by 2050, they say.

The farmers appear to agree. They say Bt cotton seeds are easily available at agro centres and fertiliser shops. They are usually

sold at ₹90 a packet, which includes 450 gm of Bt cotton seeds for the main field and 120 gm for non-Bt seeds that act as refuge seeds along the periphery of the main field. **'Helps in Pest Control':** Basavaraj says, "Bt cotton has been very helpful in reducing the damage caused by bollworm (an insect that damages the part of the cotton plant that can be sold)."

Earlier, farmers growing traditional cotton had to spray pesticide 10 to 15 times during the peak growth period of cotton to

control bollworm infection. Now, with Bt cotton, pesticide sprays have come down by 70 per cent, to just 3-4 rounds," he adds.

Kallanagouda says non-Bt growers used to get a yield of four to five quintals, which is a low return. "With Bt cotton seeds, we are actually investing less on pesticides and labour and getting a yield of 8-10 quintals," he says.

He puts the rise in earnings at 50-60 per cent, and adds with happiness that today, 90 per cent of the cotton generated in India is from Bt seeds.