

# GM crops all set to enter India

## Govt nearly wins over confidence of resisting organisations like SJM, BKS

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**New Delhi:** The pro-technology Modi government is desperate to introduce genetically modified (GM) crops. It is now holding closed-door meetings with the right wing-affiliated groups – the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) and the Bhartiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) – to end their opposition to the crops.

“The aim is to dispel fears about GM crops, so that the country can join the US, China and Canada. GM crops are very important for India’s agriculture growth,” says an agriculture ministry official.

“Since the BJP is in power at the Centre and in most states now, implementation won’t be an issue. Besides, the government is pumping more money into GM crops. They are setting up universities and projects,” he said.

GM crops are still under debate the world over. This debate, says the WHO, is likely to continue, probably in the broader context of other uses of biotechnology (e.g. in human medicine) and their consequences for human societies.

### What are GM organisms?

According to the World Health Organization, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) can be defined as organisms (i.e. plants, animals or microorganisms) in which the genetic material (DNA) has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally by mating and/or natural recombination.

### Is it the same as gene tech?

This technology is often called “modern biotechnology” or “gene technology”, sometimes also “recombinant DNA technology” or “genetic engineering”. It allows select individual genes to be transferred from one organism into another, also between non-related species. Foods produced from or using GM organisms are often referred to as GM foods, explains WHO.

### Why do SKM, BKS oppose it?

Like many organisations around the world, SJM and BKS also have raised many concerns. Their main concerns are food and environment safety. They have also raised questions as to whether Bt Cotton with one gene is a failure.

### What’s the govt doing now?

The latest meeting, on January 29, was convened by environment minister Prakash Javadekar. It was attended by SJM and BKS representatives and senior genetics and biotechnology scientists. A standing committee to ensure that the concerns of the SJM and BKS are addressed was also formed.

### Are they convinced?

One of the scientists attending the meeting told dna: “The questions were very valid and they were not talking like anti-GM activists. They understood what was being explained to them, and in most of the things they seemed to be even convinced.”

### Why so much of hurry now?

“It’s high time. India should clear its stand like other nations. You can’t linger on for years like this. More than hundreds of crores are being spent on public research for GM crops, and if you don’t need this technology, why waste time and funds?” he said. If our position is “no”, it should be told openly, so that other alternatives can be worked upon, the official said.

### What if SJM, BKS are convinced?

Once they come on board, the government may waive off the No Objection Certificate (NOC) by state governments. The NOCs were introduced by former environment minister Jairam Ramesh in 2011 after Bihar, Kerala, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh refused trials of GM crops, arguing that agriculture is a state subject.

### Are there GM crops in India?

Bt cotton was the first crop approved for commercial cultivation in India. The Bt cotton (Bollgard) was approved in 2002. But in February 2010, the government imposed a moratorium on the commercial cultivation of Bt brinjal EE-I, the first biotech food crop, due to concerns aired by green activists.

### What the Sangh outfits are concerned about

- ① If GM crops are successful, why are two genes stacked in the new Bt Cotton?
- ② If India’s biosafety system is robust, how did Monsanto conduct illegal trials for its genetically modified Okra (ladyfinger)?
- ③ Can India produce its own genes so that the country is not dependent on MNCs for GM technology?
- ④ Why are GM crops not increasing yields?
- ⑤ Can there be a way by which farmers can keep GM seeds with them and use it again and again?
- ⑥ Are genetically modified food safe to consume?
- ⑦ How will GM crops affect biodiversity?