

Gene may help reduce GM contamination

» Researchers have identified a gene that can help reduce potential contamination of conventional crops by genetically modified crops, report agencies from Toronto.

Genetically modified crops have long drawn fire from opponents worried about potential contamination of other plants.

"There are a lot of transgenic crops worldwide. There is concern about pollen from them being able to fertilize something in the wild population, thus creating 'super weeds'," said study co-author Jay Subramanian from the University of Guelph in Canada.

This is believed to be the first-ever study to identify a gene involved in altering fruit trees that normally cross-pollinate -- needing one plant to fertilize another -- into self-pollinators, lead author Sherif Sherif from University of Guelph noted.

Sherif said researchers might one day insert this gene into GM crops to prevent their pollen from reaching other plants.

Besides aiding crop farmers and food producers, their discovery might be a boon to perfume-makers, Subramanian pointed out.

Used in fragrant perennials such as jasmine, the gene might keep flowers closed and allow growers to collect more of the aromatic compounds prized by perfume-makers.

"When the flower opens, you lose almost 80 per cent of those volatiles," Subramanian explained.