

India has 4th largest area under GM crops

OUR BUREAU

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India ranked fourth in the area under genetically modified (GM) crops in 2014, says a report by the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA).

The body estimates that total global GM-coverage touched 181.5 million hectares (m ha) last year with the addition of 6.3 m ha. In India, a further 600,000 hectares came under Bt cotton bringing the total GM acreage to 11.6 m ha, equalling transgenics' coverage in Canada.

"We have seen more adoption in developing countries since 2011. No other technology has been adopted as fast as GM in agricultural history," said Bhagirath Choudhary, Director, ISAAA (South Asia), at the launch of the report, noting that of 28 countries to have adopted GM technology, 20 were developing nations.

Ever expanding

The US led the pack with 3 m ha added in 2014, bringing total acreage under GM-cultivation to 73.1 m ha. Brazil followed with 42.2 m ha while

Argentina recorded 24.3 m ha.

In sixth-placed China, acreage decreased by 300,000 ha to 3.9 m ha. This was attributed to recent debates over safety concerns with the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture stating recently that a line had to be drawn between research and commercial production of GM food crops.

Bangladesh approved the production of Bt Brinjal last year which was grown by 120 farmers across 12 ha. "They are experimenting with late blight-resistant potato and Golden Rice under field conditions. The Government is keen to further Bt Cotton research and have collaborated with Chinese companies," said Choudhary.

India's cotton output, pegged at 40 million bales (of 170 kg each) in 2013-14, has often been attributed to the spread of Bt hybrids since 2002. Around 95 per cent of cotton grown domestically is GM, led by Monsanto's Boll-guard technology.

Maharashtra recently allowed open field trials of four transgenic lines in chickpea, cotton, rice and brinjal.