

GM ON

India should take a leaf from the EU's book and find ways to allow GM trials



Even though India stands to benefit greatly from GM crops, it has stymied their trials while developed nations, which probably have a lesser need for these crops, have shown some flexibility for testing and introduction, despite their scepticism. The latest in this club is the European Union (EU) whose member nations reached a compromise last week, as per Nature magazine, on the policy governing GM crops.

The EU principle had, so far, required all member nations to honour EU approvals of such crops. The approval process requires the European Food Security Authority to present a risk-assessment report to the European Commission, which then takes a decision that must be approved by a “qualified majority” of the member states. Given this backdrop, nations resisting the technology had held up approvals for long—for instance, the application for approval of a GM maize variety had been hanging fire since 1996. But member states will now have the power to overrule EU approvals of GM crops in their jurisdictions. While the GM lobby thinks of this as a “non-cultivation agreement”, EU watchers cited in the Nature report predict that compromise reached would only fast-track GM crop approvals now that the naysayers don't have to honour these. India must take a leaf or two from the EU's book and push adoption of GM crops—the global acreage under GM has risen in the last couple of years, accounting for 81% of the total soya crop and 64% of the total cotton crop. India needs GM technology, given the country's population is growing while the farming strength is steadily shrinking. Besides, in view of the climate and topography of the country, Indian agriculture needs lab-to-farm process to focus on drought-resistant, salinity-resistant varieties, something that GM can deliver effectively.