

India's GM crop area is more than China's

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NEW DELHI: Are genetically-modified crops on course to being the future of food despite the opposition? Evidence suggests they may well be, as more emerging economies try them out — Brazil to India.

The facts can astonish. At 11.6 million hectares, the area of GM crops in India is now equivalent to Canada's and more than China's. The upsurge is extraordinary, since it entirely comes from just one crop India has approved so far: Bt cotton. In contrast, Canada grows a range of such GM crops, canola and soybean. India's adoption rate for Bt cotton has been 95%.

GM crops are those whose seeds are genetically altered for various types of benefits, such as resistance to pests or higher nutrients.

For the third year in a row in 2014, developing countries planted more biotech crops than industrialised nations, the update by the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAA), a non-profit that advocates GM crops, stated.

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The growth comes in spite of a fiercely polarised debate around GM crops. Last year, protestors destroyed a field where Gold Rice was being tested in Philippines. In China, where public protests are highly regulated, anti-GM protestors have turned up to protest before the agricultural ministry.

But with large chunks of the population in developing countries dependent on farms, more poor and small-holding farmers now grow GM crops, signalling the faster scale of adoption.

Latest provisional estimate by economists G Brookes and P Barfoot indicate India enhanced farm income from Bt cotton by about ₹98,000 crore in the 12-year-period between 2002 and 2013.



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