

Maharashtra approves field trials for 4 GM crops

Brinjal, rice, chickpea and cotton strains to be tested on university farms

OUR BUREAUS

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The Maharashtra government has decided to allow agricultural bodies and companies to conduct field trials of four genetically-modified (GM) crops.

According to a source in the know, no-objection certificates (NOC) have been given for trials of brinjal, rice, chickpea (chana) and cotton on Thursday.

"Field trials will be conducted in four crop segments in the State, the NOC was given on Thursday," said CD Mayee, ex-Director of the Central Institute for

Cotton Research, at a meeting held by the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications here on Friday.

The Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises Agricultural Group (ABLE-AG), a GM-advocacy body, and Monsanto India declined to comment saying they were unaware of the development.

However, official sources in Mumbai said the State government has decided to accept the recommendations of Anil Kakodkar-led sub-committee, which advises the state on allow-

ing field trials. Mayee serves as a member of a sub-committee.

Trials for GM maize, conducted by Monsanto in at least two agricultural universities in Maharashtra, had been allowed last year by the panel.

It is mandatory for bodies to get an NOC from States, besides an initial nod from the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee, to conduct field trials of GM crops since June 2011.

"The tests will only be conducted only on university farms and not farmers fields and every application will be scrutinised thoroughly by sub-committees, like the one I serve on, and then recommended to the Kakodkar panel," said Mayee, adding that ap-

provals took about eight months. Punjab, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh besides Maharashtra, are among the key States to have allowed non-laboratory-based GM trials while Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, among others, have banned the tests.

Around 8-10 companies, including Bayer BioScience and BASF, have submitted applications to test rice and cotton varieties reared for nitrogen efficiency while the brinjal variety was evolved by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI). Chickpea trials were requested by Sungro Seeds which obtained Bt technology from the Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat.



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