

Kheti Virasat Mission opposes GM mustard

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Opposing the approval of GM mustard, which is under review by the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), a number of members of the Kheti Virasat Mission, along with some farmers, raised slogans against the government while staging a protest opposite to the District Administrative Complex here today.

Protesting against the GM mustard seeds, the Kheti Virasat Mission claimed that the transgenic technology was unnatural and imprecise breeding technology, which would later prove harmful for health and environment.

Umendra Dutt, chairman of the Kheti Virasat Mission, said, "This GM mustard is similar to Bayer's GM mustard that was rejected by the Indian regulators in 2002 as in this year, a similar GM mustard with bar, barnase and barstar genes, in a hybrid line, was rejected by the Indian regulators when Bayer's subsidiary Pro Agro sought a commercial cultivation approval for the same. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) declared that it was not sat-



Members of the Kheti Virasat Mission and farmers outside the District Administrative Complex in Bathinda on Thursday.

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isfied with the testing that the GMO underwent."

He said, "Moreover, the state government and the leading mustard growing states do not want even field trials. Major mustard growing states in India like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana did not want even field trials of this GM mustard to take place in their states. In India, agriculture being a state government subject as per the constitution, this is the important factor to consider when discussing approvals related to GMOs. It was one of the main factors behind the Bt brinjal moratorium."

"Mustard is used both as

food and medicine in Ayurveda. Mustard seeds and oil are used separately as well as in various formulations for a variety of treatment. The impact of GM mustard on such uses is unstudied and unclear. GM mustard will impact honey bees and the industry adversely," added Umendra Dutt.

On the other hand, an association of 13 leading biotechnology companies focused on research and development of innovative agriculture also expressed their views on the protest that has taken place in Chandigarh and at other places across the state by few groups opposing the approval of GM mustard.

"These protests are against science and misleading, as they perpetuate incorrect perceptions about agriculture biotechnology among public. The GM mustard has been introduced after extensive research and trials, which have been ongoing since the last 16 years under the leadership of renowned scientist of Delhi University, Dr Deepak Pental, and funded by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and National Dairy Development Board (NDDB). Now, it has been submitted to the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC). The protest implies that they do not even want a scientific review of the research. All we are saying is that let the GEAC make a decision. Protesting against a technology without letting the regulators reviewing the efficacy and safety is not right. In any case, we would like to highlight that genetically modified food has been consumed for over two decades across the world and not even a single case of adverse effect has been reported," said Dr Shivendra Bajaj, executive director, Association of Biotech Led Enterprises-Agriculture Focus Group (ABLE-AG).