

Agri expert: Test GM crops at univ farms for fair verdict

Swaminathan: Trials Will Help Cultivate Trust

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New Delhi: Eminent agricultural scientist M S Swaminathan claims to have a solution for states reluctant to allow field-testing of genetically modified (GM) crops.

Swaminathan has suggested that the country's premier research institution — Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) — should organise an 'all India coordinated project' for field tests of genetically engineered crops at the farms of agriculture universities as it would provide a uniform method of assessment.

The father of India's green revolution said the country will not be able to assess the benefits and risks (of GM crops) in a reliable manner unless field-testing is permitted. In order to ensure it, he

NEW CROP UNDERGOES FIELD TRIAL

- ICAR & IARI develop a low erucic acid Indian mustard variety namely Pusa Mustard-30 (PM-30) — a **non-GM variety** (higher erucic acid content leads to diseases like myocardial fibrosis in adults and lipidosis in children, thereby affecting health)
- **Normal mustard varieties** possess **more than 40%** of erucic acid
- **PM-30** contains **less than 2%** of erucic acid, using conventional breeding method
- PM-30 contains the **best combination of essential**



fatty acids like Oleic acid – it makes the oil healthier with enhanced shelf life

- It also has **high yield** potential
- ICAR-IARI has been mentoring a Rajasthan-based private company to develop a **new edible oil brand**, using PM-30
- This is the **first of its kind of effort by ICAR-IARI** under

PPP mode to launch an indigenously developed health value product with improved oil quality

- PM-30 is already in the **commercial cultivation** stage
- Large-scale commercial cultivation is being supported by the **South Asia Biotechnology Centre**

has proposed that the government establish a national 'Bio-Safety Regulatory Authority', and encourage research in public institutions in the fields of molecular biology and genetic engineering.

"The Maharashtra government has now given permission to seed firms to begin field trials with GM varieties of rice, corn, chickpea and

cotton. Probably other states may also take similar action. In this context, the proposal I made 10 years ago (the ICAR-organised all India coordinated project) is worthy of implementation," the scientist said in response to **TOI's** questions through email.

He has suggested that bio-safety experts be made project coordinators, so that field

trials can be judged from more aspects than just agricultural utility.

With the matter of field trials at a complete standstill in many states, he added, "The sooner this is done, the greater will be the public confidence in procedures adopted for assessing risks and benefits."

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