

Exclusive: “India should learn from Bangladesh’s Bt Brinjal experience”

In chat with the BioVoice News, Dr Shivendra Bajaj, Executive Director, Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises-Agriculture Group (ABLE-AG) while referring to Bangladesh’s successful experience with the Bt Brinjal stressed on the need for decisiveness on pending matters that hold key to future of agriculture. Read the detailed interview for his views:

By **Rahul Koul** - February 14, 2016



Dr Shivendra Bajaj, Executive Director, ABLE-AG.



What was the focus of ABLE-AG’s activities at the recently held Bangalore Bio event?

Dr Shivendra Bajaj: ABLE-AG has been the knowledge partner of the Bangalore Bio and we did our best to spread the message about opportunities in the agriculture-biotechnology sector of our country. There was a live demo of Bt Cotton’s making and its success. Apart from the exhibition part at the event, we have been trying to ensure that the common man gets to know the benefits of using biotechnology in agriculture. We have been educating people about the technologies with utmost benefit for our society. The awareness on harmful effects of pesticides and need for production of disease resistant hybrid varieties are few of them.

There was an elaborated session on the agri-biotech scenario in India during the event where eminent people from policymaking to industry. It was great to listen to the Bangladesh’s Agriculture Minister, Ms Matia Chowdhury who was present on the occasion to share her country’s experiences with the Bt Brinjal. She was highly appreciative of the genetically modified technology and mentioned that they are soon going to implement Golden Rice and Disease Resistant Potato programs. We feel that India too should learn from the positive experiences of Bangladesh.



Have you approached the environment ministry on the GM Mustard issue? What has been their response?

We have been involved in a dialogue at various levels as it is an ongoing issue. However, our main argument here always been around the technology’s development by the scientists with repute. In case of recent GM Mustard issue, we have Dr Deepak Pental who is a highly respected scientist with international reputation. We feel the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) has to focus on the science and leave the politics out. Evaluation of technology has to be on the basis of science.



How do you look at the statements by the activists that they have a right to protest against the GM Mustard?

While there can be no doubt about that but it can’t be without any reasoning. The scientific basis and data gathered over the years can’t be ignored just due to emotions running high. And it is astonishing to find that activists protested during the GEAC meeting when even the data was also not revealed yet. They must trust their own scientists.



What are your views on the continuation of moratorium on Bt brinjal that enters 7th year on Feb 10th, 2016?

It is unfortunate that while in India GM Brinjal got caught in politics, Bangladesh has entered into its 3rd year of commercialization. We hope that there will be some positive movement on the issue this year.



Critics say that the GM Crops are not the only way to increase productivity? Do you agree and what are the alternatives?

All technologies should be explored. Obviously, one size fits all approach can’t be applied in agriculture. As pointed out by you, even Marker Assisted Selection (MAS) technique wherever it can deliver, is welcome. At the same time, the evidence based methodology to select the techniques for cultivating the crops with desired traits, disease resistance and higher productivity.



What are your pre-budget expectations from the government for the agri-biotech industry?

We expect the government to focus on science and technology and give due attention to its funding in this budget. The Startup India and Digital India programs of the government besides the Make in India must be promoted in the agriculture sector too. The promotion of technology has to be on the topmost of agenda.