

Association of Biotech led Enterprises (Agriculture Focus Group) welcomes NITI Aayog's occasional paper on agricultural productivity

Association of Biotech Led Enterprises, Agriculture Focus Group (ABLE-AG), a non-profit organization to promote research and development of agriculture biotechnology in India today welcomed the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog's occasional paper titled, ***"Raising agricultural productivity and making farming remunerative for farmers"*** that was released recently. ABLE AG supports the report's assessment that encourages the need of agri-biotechnology in the country. The association strongly condemns the objections raised by the anti GM activists which are against science as they perpetuate incorrect perceptions about the agriculture biotechnology among public.

The Niti Aayog paper identifies five important aspects of agriculture that need immediate attention to bring economic advantages to millions of farm families namely- output per hectare, remunerative prices realisation by farmers, complicated land leasing laws leaving productive lands uncultivated, inadequate relief measures in the event of natural disasters and finally seeks interventions for harnessing potentials for Eastern region of the county. The paper offers suggestions on how these problems can be addressed so as to accelerate agricultural growth and bring remunerative prices to farmers.

Highlighting the findings, **Dr. Paresh Verma, Head of Management Committee, ABLE-AG** said, "We strongly agree with the paper by Niti Aayog, both in form and substance. This is the first time that a government think-tank has endorsed the use of agriculture biotechnologies for agriculture in India, considering it as relevant, safe and necessary. We agree that as a part of its strategy to bring a second Green Revolution, India must adopt proven and well-tested GM technologies with adequate safeguards. This is required urgently in the area of oilseeds and pulses. We also believe that Indian researchers and institutions need to be encouraged to develop new seeds and technologies that will enhance agricultural productivity. We are very pleased to see these sentiments echoed in the report as well."

On the issue of technological interventions highlighted in the paper, ABLE-AG believes that to increase productivity there has to be quality and judicious use of inputs such as water, seeds, fertilizer and pesticides. There needs to be judicious and safe usage of modern technology including genetically modified (GM) seeds. Productivity enhancement requires research towards the development of new seed varieties and other inputs, appropriate crops and input usage for a given soil type and effective extension practices.

Dr. Shivendra Bajaj, Executive Director, Association of Biotech Led Enterprises- Agriculture Focus Group (ABLE-AG) further added, "Agriculture-biotechnology including genetically modified (GM) seeds have emerged as a powerful new technology promising high productivity that can lower use of inputs required for agriculture in the last one to two decades and have gained increasing acceptance among farmers around the world. In particular, the success of Bt cotton in India and many more GM crops elsewhere in the world testifies to the potential of agri-biotechnology technology in giving a major boost to productivity in agriculture. India should explore use of GM technologies with relevant safeguards in areas where conventional technology has failed. GM seed varieties can also help in mitigating the adverse effects of pesticides on human health and environment, food safety, abiotic stresses and vitamin and nutrient deficiencies in diets."

This paper is based on the work of the **Task Force on Agricultural Development** constituted by the NITI Aayog, Government of India in March 2015.