

'Allow field testing of genetically modified crops'

Criticising the moratorium on field tests for genetically modified (GM) crops eminent agricultural scientist Dr. M. Mahadevappa, here on Thursday, opined that such a move was detrimental for the farming sector. "If the field trials of GM crops were encouraged, scientists would have come out with drought-resistant varieties by now," he said. He was speaking at the inauguration of a State-level seminar on farmers' suicides organised by Mysore University's Post-Graduation Centre Hemagangotri.

"There used to be strong opposition towards releasing Bt cotton in India. Finally, Bt cotton was released in 2002. In eight years, India became the second largest cotton producer in the world. Before the introduction of Bt cotton, we were in the fifth position. This is the advantage of advanced technology," he said.

Scientists at UAS Dharwad have cultivated Bt brinjal, but have not yet received permission to conduct field trials. They have been waiting for approval to conduct a field trial of Bt brinjal since February 2012. "If they were allowed to conduct trials, by now, the scientists would have come out with drought-resistant varieties of various crops, proving to be of great help to farmers," he said.

Dr. Mahadevappa, who is also former Vice-Chancellor of UAS Dharwad, took a dig at the emphasis on organic farming. "Agriculture is nothing but organic farming. Along with it, we have to adopt new technologies to get a better yield. Nowadays, some people are getting undue publicity in the name of organic farming," he said.

Further, he said, before the green revolution in the country, food production was only 45 lakh tonnes. "If the production had not increased, it would have been difficult to get even one meal a week," he stressed.

Dr. Mahadevappa recommended the setting up of Special Agriculture Zones, besides Special Economic Zones with agro-based industries for the betterment of the farming sector. "We fall behind when it comes to accepting advanced technology. This has been one of the main reasons our farmers are facing so many problems," he said.

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Dr. M. Mahadevappa
agricultural scientist

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