

# Environment Min Cleared 80% Proposals for GM Crops Field Trials, Despite Protests

by Richa Sharma

**New Delhi:** Amid the ongoing debate over commercialisation of genetically modified (GM) crops in the country, the Environment Ministry's appraisal committee has cleared nearly 80 per cent of proposals seeking to conduct field trials of GM crops in eight meetings held since the NDA came to power in May, 2014.

This, despite pressure mounted by RSS-affiliated organisations, Swadeshi Jagran Manch and Bhartiya Kissan Sangh, which are opposed to field trials and commercialisation of GM crops, not to give its nod. The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) considered 51 proposals for controlled trials of GM crops like various varieties of rice,

sugarcane, maize, brinjal, potato and mustard. The committee has so far cleared 40 projects for field trials, deferred decision on eight owing to reasons like seeking expert opinion while three were withdrawn. The first meeting of the GEAC under the new regime was held on August 28, 2014 and the latest on March 4, 2016.

Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar has favoured field trials of GM crops and has said that research and confined field trials for generat-



ing bio-safety data with all due precautions should be allowed to continue in national interest. However, calling GM crops unwanted and unsafe, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch had last year asked the government to stop field trials, which were being cleared in a great hurry.

The Environment Ministry has held a consultative meeting with scientists and the SJM to accommodate views of all the stakeholders. Some agriculturists are pitching for introduction of GM crops, pointing out

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that it's important for the country's food security. Bt Cotton is the only GM crop legally allowed for commercial release in India. A moratorium on Bt Brinjal was announced in February 2010 by the then environment minister Jairam Ramesh after protests from civil society organisations and farmers. The government had then called for a scientific study and consensus on the issue.

A Supreme Court technical expert committee in 2013 had even recommended an indefinite moratorium on the field trials of GM crops till the government came up with a proper regulatory and safety mechanism. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, in a report in August 2012, had also sought a ban on GM food crops in the country.