

'Make public biosafety info on GM mustard'

CIC Orders Regulator To Clear The Air

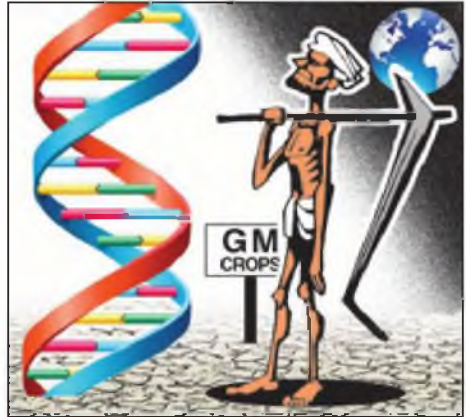
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New Delhi: In an order intended to make the decision-making process on transgenic food crops in India more transparent, the Central Information Commission (CIC) has directed the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) — the apex regulatory body for GMOs (genetically modified organisms) — to make public the non-confidential biosafety dossier of GM mustard and other GMOs by April 30.

Under the CIC order, the GEAC is expected to put out all the biosafety details in public domain after separating confidential information.

The order was issued on April 1 on the application of environment activist Kavitha Kuruganti who sought information on field trials of GM mustard, arguing that biosafety data could not be confidential since it pertained to results of testing of a GMO for public safety assessment.

The GEAC, which comes under the environment ministry, had refused to part with the information saying sharing of data would breach the commercial confidence of the Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants of Delhi University that had approached the regulator for clearing



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commercial release of the GM mustard (DMH11).

But the Central Information Commission rejected the central regulator's argument. "People should know how and why GM mustard is being permitted or denied because they have to consume that food or feed and face the consequences. It is a policy decision by the public authority which needs to be revealed to the public in general as mandated because they are going to be affected if GM mustard is marketed," information commissioner Sridhar Acharyulu said in his order.

The decision to release GM mustard for commercial cultivation is currently pending with the central regulator. Though the GEAC was scheduled to meet on April 11 to examine the details, it postponed its meeting. The issue has got highly politicised with anti-GM activists and a section of scientists locked in a polarised debate. While UPA took a conservative line, some Sangh outfits are also wary about the implications of GMOs.

At present, only GM cotton is allowed for commercial cultivation in India.