

'GM crops ideal for drought-hit TS'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD: Introduction of genetically modified crops will help reduce acute drought crisis in Telangana, opined senior scientists and researchers who conducted talks under the aegis of the Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises (ABLE) here on Wednesday.

Use of biotechnology in agriculture would reduce irrigation requirement in the State by 25 per cent, scientists said.

'Use biotechnology'

Speaking at a media meet here, four scientists including Dr. P. Ananda Kumar, Principal Scientist, Biotechnology Unit, Indian Institute of Rice Research, Dr. B. Seikeran, former director of National Institute of Nutrition, Dr. Ajay Panchbhai, Biotechnology Affairs Manager-India, DuPont Pioneer and Dr. Shivendra Bajaj, Executive Director, ABLE-AG, recommended use of biotechnology in agriculture.

"Farmers should be introduced to drought resistant variants of rice, a crop which is highly water reliant. Scientists from India and abroad have developed genetically modified variants which will be suitable for soil in Telangana," Dr. Kumar said. Apart from rice varieties, scientists in New Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Hyderabad among other cities, have come up with biotechnologically experimented and better varieties of vegetables and food grains, the scientists explained.

"For a drought-hit state like Telangana, it is essential to curtail farmer distress and introduce different GM as well as non-GM crop varieties. Drought-resistant variants of crops that can withstand high temperatures and reduced irrigation should be considered along with herbicide tolerance and nitrogen use efficiency, especially in the case of rice, Telangana's primary food-grain," Dr. Sesikeran said at the meet. He also highlighted that GM crops were

sae and nutritious.

Drought had reduced rice production in Telangana from 4.5 million tonnes to 3 million tonnes in 2015. This is because for each kilogram of rice grown in Telangana, the farmer uses approximately 3,145 litres of water. Speaking of GM research, Dr. Bajaj asked the government to speed up support in the field. "There has to be a concerted effort to drive agricultural growth through technology interventions. Telangana has several GM crops where field trials are pending including rice, cotton, wheat among other grains," he said. Putting to rest doubts about safety of GM trials, Dr. Panchbhai said that regulatory framework in the country was as stringent as any other developed nation and proper measures were taken before any crop was approved for field trials or environmental release.

Introduction of GM crops would also help in improvement of groundwater levels, the scientists said.