

Global Biotech Firms Positive on GM Regulatory Regime

KVL Akshay & Nishtha Saluja

New Delhi: Global biotechnology firms are positive about India's robust regulatory regime for approving genetically modified crops, which has started functioning transparently and effectively in recent months after years of lethargy, though concerns over Monsanto's woes linger, top executives representing international companies said.

The key change in the regulatory approach is in the regular meetings of the apex approval body, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), which is now meeting every month, ending its inactive phase when the panel didn't meet for long periods, at times for a year, executives said.

"Process at the central level has

Process for GM Seeds Approval

- **Official panels** run safety tests and generate biosafety report
- **Another panel** confirms gene trait stability
- **Results of** field trials are monitored and evaluated by another panel
- **GEAC then** studies these reports and gives approval
- **States need** to allow these trials in their university grounds



improved a lot since last few months," said Shivendra Bajaj, executive director of Association of Biotech-led Enterprises, Agriculture-focus Group (ABLE-AG).

"Now, GEAC is happening on a regular basis (and) has been very

transparent. They have been doing the right thing now. I think the present position of the (Central) government with regard to science is encouraging." ABLE-AG counts Bayer, Monsanto, Syngenta and Dow Agrsciences among its mem-



ON THE RIGHT WAY



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bers. As the dispute between the biotechnology companies and indigenous seed manufacturers over patent rights lingers, the favourable assessment of a key committee formed under the GEAC with regard to genetically-modified (GM) mustard or 'DMH-11' has invigora-

ted biotechnology providers about the prospects of investing in India.

The process of approval for transgenic crops includes biosafety committees, review committees, monitoring and evaluation committees for field trials, and the GEAC, following which the environment ministry needs to sign off for commercialisation of GM crops.

Case in point is the moratorium on Bt brinjal despite GEAC clearance. Further, states have the option of refusing to allow field trials or deployment of GM crops despite regulatory approvals. And this is where, according to the biotech firms, maximum reform needs to take place. "There is a process of NOC before you. Certain states have come on record who refuse (to give an NOC). So, even if GEAC approves, the state government is a major challenge for us," said Bajaj.