

GM mustard safe and supportive of honey bee population: Experts

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Refuting the claims of anti-Genetically Modified (GM) crops lobby here, several experts assured the bio-safety of the crop, adding that many are busy with fear-mongering while GM crops are being used across the world.

The reaction came as several activists gear up to counter a possible green signal to the GM mustard by the Union Ministry of Environment, that will receive comments till the first week of October.

Meanwhile, beekeepers also held protest here against GM mustard, claiming it would kill the bees.

Quoting studies and scientists, research organisations like South Asia Biotechnology Centre (SABC) and Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises, Agriculture Focus Group (ABLE-AFG) said while the GM mustard "bolsters honey bee population", the "myths" associated with GM crops are nothing but fear-mongering.

"GM mustard does not contain any insecticide that will kill honeybees visiting its flowers, nor enhances use of sprayable insecticides. On the contrary, GM mustard with its hybrid vigor will help in increasing more visits of honey bees and consequently of their population," a report by SABC stated quoting Dr. Govind Gujar, former head, Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi.

Report by ABLE-AFG quoted Deepak Pental, Professor of Genetics, Delhi University: "We have carried out all the necessary studies with respect to bio-safety of the GM Mustard hybrid DMH-11 and its parental lines. The issues being raised are to stop the use of genetic engineering technologies for improving crop productivity in the country."

The professor -- among the developer of the hybrid and who had submitted a bio-safety report to the Union Environment Ministry -- called it unethical to create fears on scientific developments among farmers and common man.

R.K. Thakur from the IARI also reassured the beekeepers saying that they should not get "swayed away with activists" advocating negative impacts on beekeeping without any robust scientific data on this aspect.

The report also quoted many examples where farmers are already using GM crops.

"Farmers in Australia, Canada and USA have been benefiting from growing GM canola (Canadian mustard) since 1996," SABC said.

ABLE-AFG pointed out, "Bt Cotton has been grown in Indian since 2002, in China since 1997 and in the US since 1995. Today GM crops are grown extensively across South Asia (including Bt Brinjal in Bangladesh)".

Biotechnology Regulatory affairs expert and professor University of Maryland Shanthu Shantharam was also quoted in the report as saying: "It seems the beekeepers have been put up as a front by the anti-GM activists in a desperate attempt to derail approvals for GM mustard. This tactic has been played out by such groups in both Europe and to some extent in the US as well. There is no scientific evidence to even remotely suggest that honey bees are affected by any GM crop."

He adds that anti-GM lobby mean to waste the time of regulators.

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