

Food security: Nobel laureates defend GM technology

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At the Nobel Dialogue during the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit in Gandhinagar Tuesday, Nobel laureates defended the Genetically Modified (GM) Food technology to provide food security on planet earth. One of the laureates, Richard Roberts (1993 Nobel in Physiology or Medicine), lauded the fact that PM Narendra Modi is pro-GM who recognises the possibilities of GM crops. He added that it was “unfortunate” that there are many in India, like NGO Greenpeace, who do not agree with Modi on the subject.

The subject of discussion during the second session of the dialogue was “Local Research, Global Impact — Addressing Global Challenges”. And it mainly remained centred around research to deal with challenges like communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases and food security.

Apart from Roberts, three other Nobel laureates who participated in the discussion included Harold Varmus (1989 Nobel for physiology or medicine), Randy Schekman (2013 Nobel in physiology or medicine) and India-born Venkatraman Ramakrishnan (2009 Nobel in chemistry).

Discussing the issue of food security, Roberts strongly defended GM food technology and came down heavily on NGOs like Greenpeace for spreading “misinformation” among public against it for “monetary gains”.

“I am one of those who believe that if you are hungry, food is more important than medicine. There are 1,800 million people in this world who go to bed hungry every night which in my view is unacceptable,” Roberts said.

“GM food have immense possibilities, but unfortunately what has happened is that there has been a tremendous amount of misinformation to public, thanks to anti-GM movement by NGOs like Greenpeace. They have persuaded that GM techniques are dangerous...Currently, there is tremendous work in the area that there is absolutely no reason (to believe) why the so-called GMOs (gene modified organisms) are more dangerous than traditionally grown plants...,” Roberts added.

“In my perspective, the green parties, notably Greenpeace, have done a tremendous dis-service in the world and you have to realise the reason why they did it. This was the way in Europe to stop Monsanto and some of the other big agri businesses from taking over the food supply. This played out very well in Europe because, first of all, Europe does not need GMOs...In the West, you do not need GMOs...if you begin a campaign to oppose it, you can make a lot of money,” Roberts said while launching an attack on the anti-GM campaign.

Roberts added that since people took the word of Nobel laureates “seriously”, they have launched a signature campaign of Nobel laureates in favour of the GM food. “So far, 123 Nobel laureates have signed it...it is to convince governments that what they hear from Green parties (on GM food) is wrong,” Roberts said.

“Fortunately, Prime Minister Modi is very pro-GMO. He recognises its possibilities which is very good. Unfortunately, you have a lot of people here who don’t think that way,” Roberts said. He was supported by Ramakrishnan on the subject during the discussion.

Ramakrishnan said, “The same people who are against GM food are perfectly willing to inject themselves with genetically engineered insulin if they are diabetics or genetically moleculed antibodies if they have lymphoma...So, this emotional disconnect between medicine and food is irrational.”