

Green groups spoiling debate around GM crops to get funds: Nobel laureate Sir Richard Roberts

The author has posted comments on this article Shikha Salaria, TNN Jan 11, 2017, 11.31PM IST

NOIDA: Nobel laureate Sir Richard Roberts, who won the Nobel Prize in Physiology in 1993 and a well-known advocate of the GM crops, said on Wednesday that the "green groups" have scared the people against GM crops in India and it is they, who need to come forward to assuage their concerns on the issue.

However, he said that in India, there is a possibility of the government taking a very positive stance on the issue.

Addressing the media after a lecture at the Amity University on Wednesday evening, Roberts said that the green outfits must admit that they did wrong by "spreading lies" around the issue.

Calling the BT Cotton example in India as "terrific", he said that the BT Brinjal is already growing in India as it being "smuggled" from Bangladesh.

He also said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is pro-GMO but other members of government have been getting things wrong and using the issue for political reasons.

"Once someone gets scared, it will be very difficult to reassure him. The very best people to assure them would be the green parties who started the problem. If they can just be honest and admit that this was an issue they got wrong. I think that would be very effective," he said when asked about what needs to be done to get the anti-GM crop groups on board on the issue.

"You live in a democracy and unfortunately some people would get things wrong and they would use the issue for political reasons and here at least, there's a possibility of the government taking a very positive stance. I think the benefits that will come from adopting GMO are going to come. We are getting better and better and better. It's fast, you need better crops since the monsoons are changing. We are not going to have the same rainfall. You will need drought-resistant crops. You are going to need changes, which won't be possible on traditional methods," he said.

Launching a tirade against the Greenpeace, an international NGO, which has been running anti-GM crops campaigns, he said that it is interested only in raising funds which they are getting from the campaign. "They are not interested in the truth, they are not interested in the fates of the Indian children, the Indian population. They are only concerned about themselves," he said.

When asked about the need for a mechanism for the regulation of GM crops, he said that even as the green parties call for regulation, yet they are against the big-agri businesses.

The Nobel Laureate is a part of a global campaign "Support Precision Agriculture" which has an online letter signed by 123 Nobel laureates urging Greenpeace and its supporters to re-examine the

experience of farmers and consumers worldwide with crops and foods "improved through biotechnology, recognise the findings of authoritative scientific bodies and regulatory agencies, and abandon their campaign against "GMOs" in general and Golden Rice in particular."

Sunil Dahiya, national-level campaigner (climate and energy), Greenpeace India told TOI that GM crops destroy the bio-diversity if there is any problem in the crop. "Greenpeace is not merely opposing the GM crops but it has also suggested alternatives like organic agriculture," he said.