



GEAC Seeks Information from Bangladesh on Bt Brinjal

Recently, India's biotech regulator, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), has sought information about Bt brinjal (a genetically modified crop) from Bangladesh, where farmers have been growing the crop since 2013.

Background

- *Bacillus Thuringiensis* Brinjal, popularly known as Bt brinjal, has been at the centre of controversy in India.
- Bt brinjal, a genetically modified strain created by India's seeds company Mahyco in collaboration with American multinational Monsanto, claims to improve yields and help the agriculture sector.
- The transgenic variety is said to resist an attack from a deadly fruit and shoot borer, one of the major insect-pests of brinjal.
- However, the safety of Bt brinjal has been debated by the scientists working for the government, farmers and environment activists.
- Environment activists say the effect of GM (genetically modified) crops on rats have shown to be fatal for lungs and kidneys. It is dangerous to introduce these experimental foods into the market without proper research.
- Further, Indian farmers would have to depend on Multinational Corporations for seeds which would be a threat to India's agriculture as the supply of seeds will be regulated and thus will be costlier.
- While Bt. Brinjal was cleared for commercialization by GEAC in 2009, the Ministry of Environment and Forest put a moratorium on its release in 2010 till scientific studies establish the safety of the product from the point of view of its long-term impact on human health and environment.
- India is yet to approve any GM technology in food crops, including GM mustard developed by the Delhi University. In 2002, India had approved Bt cotton, the only non-food GM crop which is grown in the country.

Recent developments

- GEAC noted that Bangladesh had approved the same Mahyco's Bt Brinjal technology in 2013 and 50,000 farmers in the country are currently growing the vegetable.
- The committee asked the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) to obtain relevant information and data on the post commercial release effects of Bt brinjal from Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute.
- The GEAC decided this on hearing a request made by Mahyco (developer of transgenic brinjal) seeking permission for large-scale environmental release and demonstration of Bt brinjal.

Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee

- The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) functions under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).
- It is responsible for the appraisal of activities involving large-scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants in research and industrial production from the environmental angle.
- The committee is also responsible for the appraisal of proposals relating to the release of genetically engineered (GE) organisms and products into the environment including experimental field trials.

- GEAC is chaired by the Special Secretary/Additional Secretary of MoEF&CC and co-chaired by a representative from the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).

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