



Herbicide-Tolerant Rice Varieties

Why in News

Recently, the **Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI)** has developed the **country's first-ever non-GM (genetically modified) herbicide-tolerant rice varieties (Pusa Basmati 1979 and Pusa Basmati 1985)**.

- These varieties **can be directly seeded** and significantly save water and labour **compared to conventional transplanting**.
- [ICAR-IARI](#) is a deemed university.

Key Points

▪ About the New Varieties of Rice:

- The new varieties contain a **mutated AcetoLactate Synthase (ALS) gene** making it possible for farmers to spray **Imazethapyr**, a broad-spectrum herbicide, to control weeds.
 - The **ALS gene** in rice codes for an enzyme (protein) that **synthesises amino acids for crop growth and development**.
 - The **herbicide sprayed on normal rice plants binds itself to the ALS enzymes, inhibiting their production of amino acids**.
- **Imazethapyr**, effective against a range of broadleaf, grassy and sedge weeds, **can't be used on normal paddy**, as the chemical **does not distinguish between the crop and the invasive plants**.
- However, the new basmati varieties contain a **mutated ALS gene** whose DNA sequence has been altered using **ethyl methanesulfonate, a chemical mutant**.
 - As a result, the ALS enzymes no longer have binding sites for Imazethapyr and amino acid synthesis isn't inhibited.
- The plants can now **"tolerate" application of the herbicide**, and hence it kills only the weeds.
- It is important to note that, as **there is no foreign gene involved in the process**, the herbicide-tolerance is through mutation breeding. **Thus, it is not a [Genetically modified organism](#)**.

▪ Advantages of These Varieties:

- **Direct Seeding of Rice Activity:** The new varieties simply replace water with Imazethapyr and there's no need for nursery, puddling, transplanting and flooding of fields.
 - Water is a natural herbicide that takes care of weeds in the paddy crop's early-growth period.
 - The new varieties will help in [Direct Seeding of Rice \(DSR\)](#) which has several **advantages over paddy transplantation**.
- **Cheaper Option:** DSR cultivation is currently based on two herbicides, Pendimethalin and Bispyribac-sodium.

- However, Imazethapyr is cheaper than these two options.
- **Safer Option:** Imazethapyr, moreover, has a wider weed-control range and is safer, as the ALS gene isn't present in humans and mammals.

Paddy Transplantation vs Direct Seeding of Rice

▪ Paddy Transplantation:

- The field where the seedlings are transplanted has to be **“puddled” or tilled in standing water.**
- For the first three weeks or so after transplanting, the plants are irrigated almost daily to maintain a water depth of 4-5 cm.
- Farmers continue giving water every two-three days even for the next four-five weeks when the crop is in **tillering (stem development) stage.**
- Paddy transplantation is **both labour- and water-intensive.**

▪ Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR):

- In DSR, the **pre-germinated seeds are directly drilled** into the field by a tractor-powered machine.
- There is no nursery preparation or transplantation involved in this method.
- Farmers have to only level their land and give one pre-sowing irrigation.

▪ Advantages with Direct Seeding of Rice:

- Water savings.
- Less numbers of labourers required.
- Saves labour cost.
- Reduce methane emissions due to a shorter flooding period and decreased soil disturbance compared to transplanting rice seedlings.

▪ Drawbacks of Direct Seeding of Rice:

- The seed requirement for DSR is also high, 8-10 kg/acre, compared to 4-5 kg/acre in transplanting.
- Further, laser land levelling is compulsory in DSR. This is not so in transplanting.
- The sowing needs to be done timely so that the plants have come out properly before the monsoon rains arrive.

Source: IE

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