

Questionable GM test ban? Debate over permitting GM foods in Indian fields is controversial on several levels

Last week a Supreme Court-mandated panel of experts that was to recommend, or ban, field trials of genetically modified (GM) food crops, effectively put paid to the future of transgenic crops in the country. The panel presented an interim report to the court and recommended a 10-year moratorium on all ongoing trials of genetically modified brinjal, tomato, rice and several other plants. The word “moratorium”, for all practical purposes a euphemism for a “ban”, entered the popular lexicon after the then environment minister Jairam Ramesh imposed a ban on the commercial release of Bt brinjal. This was a reversal of an approval accorded by the environment ministry’s own scientific body. Irrespective of the apex court’s views on transgenic crops, the very fact that technical issues such as bio-safety, allergenicity—and the establishment for a comprehensive, transparent protocol for testing transgenic seeds—must be discussed on the back of intervention by courts—shows the government’s appalling handling of scientific regulation.

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