How GM crops can help address India’s food security problems

The new environment minister Prakash Javadekar is yet to take a call on allowing further trials of genetically-modified (GM) crops. Ram Kaundinya, Chairman, Association of Biotechnology-Led Enterprises (Agriculture Group), spoke to *Financial Express* on the need for using biotechnology for meeting the rising demand for food in the country.

The new agriculture minister, Radha Mohan Singh, has stated that GM technology should be adopted in case of urgent needs. What would be your approach?

We have always maintained that this technology is no silver bullet that solves all the problems. The objective of food and nutritional security of the nation will need a basket of solutions of which GM technology is a part. We should deploy the technology where it can deliver the best value to the farmer and the consumer. The government and the industry together should identify high-priority crops and traits for which GM technology would be beneficial for India. This will help the industry to focus its efforts with the government providing the necessary policy support. As India asserts its position globally, it must use the best technologies for the benefit of its farmers and develop technologies for long-term agricultural sustainability.

What should be done to promote GM research in the country?

We have only made a modest beginning, with Bt cotton (the only GM crop allowed for commercial cultivation), but much more is possible if this technology finds application in food crops as well. The other traits being developed, such as drought- and salinity-tolerance, improved nitrogen- and water-use efficiency, and enhanced nutritional quality can benefit India. These technologies can help farming in drought-prone areas and on saline soil while paring down the government’s subsidy bill.

GM trait development is at various stages for more than nine crops and with over 50 events in India. It is interesting to note that over 50% of these research projects are on at public sector institutions, with huge financial investment. All these developments, at both public and private sectors research facilities, have been put on hold since 2010, causing enormous delays in making these technologies available to the farmers. Agro-biotech could be used as one of the solutions to address the economic and social needs of a growing population.

Read the full, original article: GM crops can help India meet its food security needs