

2014 World Food Prize recipient: 'Shameful' if India lets biotech pass

Dr Sanjaya Rajaram often remembers that his mentor, Nobel Peace prize winner Dr Norman Borlaug, always said: "Peace does not come from empty bellies." They waged their fight against hunger that helped countries including India feed their ever growing population. The India-born Rajaram, now a citizen of Mexico, will receive the 2014 World Food Prize for his research and breakthrough breeding technologies for wheat — one of the big reasons for increase in world wheat production. The World Food Prize is equivalent of the Nobel Prize. Rajaram was a wheat breeder Dr Borlaug hired in the late 1960s and worked with him for decades. Rajaram tells *Financial Express*'s Geeta Nair that adopting new technology and innovations is the way to meet the challenge of feeding growing populations. Excerpts:

The spread of high-yielding varieties and disease-resistant wheat expanded output globally. India has become an exporter. Can this growth be sustained? Do you see threats to food security in India in the future?

Wheat and rice have been sustained for 50 years. We have maintained the small genetic gains. However, the potential to maximise these gains lies in good agronomic practices, especially timely planting. Chemical fertilisers and water played a great role. The response in increased output wouldn't have been possible without dwarf varieties. For this, a lot of credit goes to Borlaug and IRRI short rices. We have scope to maximize production by bringing mechanisation, water use efficiency through modern irrigation systems, micronutrients' application and growth hormones and in certain situation conservation agriculture. We need to give good seeds to all farmers. We need to reach out to the difficult regions with these technologies.

Chemical fertilisers and pesticides were a big part of the Green Revolution but the adverse impact of indiscriminate use is being felt on the soil as well as people's health. How does India deal with the conflicting needs of feeding a billion-plus population without compromising health of the soil or the people?

We cannot apply chemicals indiscriminately. This has polluted our precious water systems and environment. We need precision agriculture to avoid these problems. In certain situations, GM crops in control of insects and diseases will help, as in cotton.

How do we address GM food critics' fears?

We need the best technology to enhance productivity of our agriculture. It would be shameful if we let GM technology pass. But it must meet the requirement of not damaging environment. We must invest in this technology to remain an independent player. We are today very dependent.

Read the full, original article: [It would be shameful if we let GM technology pass](#)