

India's political flip-flopping over new GM field trials paralyzes innovation

In August, India's ruling nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stopped its legislators from accepting Monsanto sponsorship to attend a farm exhibition in the US state of Iowa. On the surface this might seem strange: attending the Farm Progress Show should be innocuous, as Monsanto routinely takes farmers, industry experts, media and MPs from various countries to visit the show and experience for themselves the advances in agriculture.

But clearly the BJP government wants to avoid any accusations of undue influence when deciding whether India, a largely farming country of 1.2 billion people, is going to grow genetically modified (GM) food crops commercially.

Soon after the May 2014 elections, the pro-business BJP government tried to overturn India's former environment minister, Jairam Ramesh's, moratorium by announcing field trials for several crops, including GM aubergine. But within weeks, pressure from groups affiliated to the party, rather than from activists, pushed the government to suspend the trials and to stop legislators from accepting Monsanto's Iowa invitation.

The government's continued flip-flopping over field trials has disappointed Indian research scientists. Delhi University has spent 18 painstaking years developing high-yielding GM mustard only to run into bans on field trials. Its developer, Deepak Pental, says that trials with good biosafety protocols are safe and should be allowed, although he concedes that GM mustard could naturally cross with non-GM varieties, once released commercially.

So will the Indian government grasp the GM nettle? Asked this question at a public meeting in August, environment minister Prakash Javdekar remained cautious—and cryptic—saying: “We are not saying no to science. We have to take proper caution. We have to take proper action.”

Read full, original article: [India Caught Between Business And Activists Over GM Crops](#)