India stalls trials of genetically modified mustard

The pull of a technology that boosts mustard yield by between a fifth and a third should have been as strong as the affinity of pakodas for mint chutney in a country that imports more cooking oil than it produces and laments the lack of breakthroughs in oilseed crops, but India is dithering.

The mustard hybrid, developed with transgenic technologies by a team led by Deepak Pental, the professor of genetics at Delhi University and its former vice-chancellor, is almost ready for use on farmers' fields and could be widely planted in about three years—the time it takes to produce seed in large quantities—if trials were allowed. "Once the farmer gets it, believe me, like Bt cotton it will spread and nobody will dare to suggest a recall," says Pental, referring to Bt cotton, India's only transgenic crop approved in 2002, which is such a hit with farmers that it covers 93% of area under cotton.

Pental rues the fact that his time—much better spent on research—is going into petitioning state leaders for permission to conduct trials (and fighting a lawsuit by a colleague for alleged plagiarism). State permissions are a requirement made necessary by former environment minister Jairam Ramesh, who stalled the commercial cultivation of Bt brinjal (allowed in Bangladesh since last year) and imposed a ten-year moratorium on testing of GM seeds (lifted by the last UPA-2 environment minister, Veerappa Moily).

Read full original article: India's myopia on GM mustard