

India changes tune and permits GM crop trials but states still block research

Five years ago, India was a hostile place for researchers testing genetically modified (GM) crops. Its government barred the commercial planting of a transgenic aubergine (a vegetable locally known as brinjal) after protests from anti-GM activists. Then it gave state governments the power to veto transgenic-crop field trials. The result: an effective moratorium on such trials.

But under the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, voted into power a year ago, India has quietly changed course on GM field testing. In the past year, eight Indian states largely aligned with Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party have approved field trials of GM crops, between them allowing tests that include transgenic rice, cotton, maize (corn), mustard, brinjal and chickpea, according to documents seen by *Nature* (see ['GM crop trials'](#)).

Development tensions

The relaxed attitude to GM crop trials is not only reviving the enthusiasm of Indian biotech researchers — it will also be keenly watched around the world, says Dominic Glover, an agricultural socio-economist at the University of Sussex in Brighton, UK. “India's attitude towards transgenic crops has a symbolic importance beyond its borders,” he says, because it epitomizes tensions that surround the use of GM technology in developing nations.

Slow progress

The new lenience on GM field trials has not reached all of India: more than 20 states and territories are still exercising their vetoes. In meetings between March and July last year, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), part of India's environment ministry, granted permission to 80 field-trial applications, but state-government blocks meant that many of the trials were never begun.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [India eases stance on GM crop trials](#)