

Indian government must layout national policy as it loosens restrictions on GMOs

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Biotech crop research in India started in the 1990s. Now, we have over half a dozen Bt cotton versions approved for commercial cultivation, which are planted on 95 percent of total cotton area.

With the huge success of Bt cotton and a smooth regulatory mechanism, the private and public sectors got enthused and heavily invested in developing biotech crops. New varieties of cotton, maize, and other crops are being developed and are in the regulatory pipeline.

The pace of biotechnology approvals slowed in 2010, with the moratorium on Bt brinjal trials. Research has been moving at a glacial pace since then. It got worse with a new requirement — no objection certificates from state governments to conduct field trials. Non-functioning regulatory bodies, pending cases in the Supreme Court, and a parliamentary standing committee's adverse report on biotech crops has added to the uncertainty.

With no permissions coming for conducting field trials chances of field trials in 2015 are almost nil. Helpless applicants are staring at another year lost in waiting. This *status quo* has severely impacted research projects, funding, talent retention and morale. In fact, we are going backwards with all these delays.

To revive crop biotech research, the Modi Government must create a national policy for development and adoption of biotech crops. Second, it must restore the functioning of the regulatory mechanism. Both these will impart immense confidence to stakeholders. Third, the concerned central ministries should initiate a dialogue with state governments about agricultural biotechnology. Based on the feedback, a road map for commercializing biotech crops can be evolved.

Such a policy framework will provide certainty and predictability to stakeholders. Only a strong national policy backbone coupled with support from state governments can end the current suspense.

Read full, original post: [Blog: Modi Govt Must Spell Out Thinking on GM Crops Through A Policy Document](#)