

India neglecting investment in improved crops, biotechnology

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Budget 2016 contained . . . areas identified for investments such as irrigation, soil health, rural connectivity and better terms for crop insurance. However, a major area of intervention — more productive varieties of food crops — has not been included. In order to meet the challenge of doubling farmers' income, we need low-input, high-output agriculture. Achieving this goal will require incisive policy decisions. . . and use of science and technology for crop improvement. . . .

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I have [visited] the research fields . . . at the University of Delhi to interact with the scientists working on mustard breeding. Their focus has been on the development of hybrids for higher yield . . . and better quality . . . Another area of focus has been breeding for resistance to diseases so that the crop can be grown without chemical protection. The research group has employed conventional as well as GE approaches. Their work is an excellent example of low-input, high-output agriculture. . . . Unfortunately, up to now, it is still awaiting biosafety clearance and cannot be planted for commercial production. For a country which imported around Rs 65,000 crore worth of edible oils in 2015, it is an awful loss of opportunity.

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