

Podcast: More fearful of crop losses than jail, Indian farmers grow illegal GMO Bt eggplant

While Indian farmers have benefited tremendously from growing insect-resistant GMO cotton, the government has outlawed the cultivation of genetically engineered food crops due to [political pressure](#) from activist groups. India's neighbor to the west, Bangladesh, has taken the opposite approach. The country's farmers have realized great gains from growing Bt brinjal (eggplant), a variety that protects itself from the destructive fruit and shoot borer using a natural bacterial protein that is toxic to the insect larvae. The crop was [approved for cultivation](#) in late 2013.

Bangladeshi farmers used to spray insecticides 80-100 times a season—approximately every other day over three months—to protect their crop. By 2014, the number of required sprays declined to 1-2 per season. Indian farmers wanted the same results, and the transgenic brinjal seeds began making their way into India, despite the fact that they have not been approved. Risking hefty fines and even jail time, farmers around the country launched a protest against the government's strict biotech crop rules on June 10, planting small areas of Bt brinjal in defiance of the law.

On this episode of Talking Biotech, geneticist C.S. Prakash outlines the importance of Bt crops to India's farmers and sketches a summary of the protests, which have garnered worldwide media coverage.

<https://geneticliteracyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/191-prakash.mp3>

C. S. Prakash is a professor of plant genetics, biotechnology and genomics at Tuskegee University. He has been recognized with the CAST Borlaug Ag Communications Award for his work on crop biotechnology. Follow him on Twitter [@AgBioWorld](#)

Kevin M. Folta is a professor in the Horticultural Sciences Department at the University of Florida. Follow professor Folta on Twitter [@kevinfolta](#) and email your questions to kfolta@ufl.edu

The [Talking Biotech podcast](#), produced by Kevin Folta, is available for listening or subscription:

[Apple Podcasts](#) | [Android](#) | [Email](#) | [Google Podcasts](#) | [Stitcher](#) | [RSS](#) | [Player FM](#) | [Pod Directory](#) | [TuneIn](#)