

Indian scientists call out anti-GMO groups trying to block insect-resistant Bt eggplant safety field trials

Alliance for Agri Innovation (AAI), a special interest group of [the] Federation of Seed Industry of India (FSII) has urged the Central and state governments to allow field trials of Bt Brinjal [eggplant] in India. A letter has been sent to the Ministry of Agriculture and chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and West Bengal to bring their attention to this matter.

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The current Bt Brinjal which is going for field trials was developed by the ICAR-National Institute of Plant Biotechnology and has been licensed to an Indian company for commercialization. This technology is different from the Bt Brinjal technology, which despite approval by GEAC, was put under moratorium in India but [has been] grown commercially by farmers in Bangladesh since 2014. According to a peer reviewed study published in 2019, net returns to farmers from Bt brinjal crop averaged US\$2151/ha....compared to US\$357/ha [for the conventional, non BT crop, an approximate 600% improvement].

"We are aware of the efforts being made by some groups to stop GM trials and limit the technological intervention which has become a necessity to stop pest and diseases in crops. We are also aware that similar activism had prevented approval of GM mustard technology which was developed by Delhi University. Blocking such trials based on non-scientific arguments and ideological differences amounts to blocking national development," AAI has said in a statement.

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