‘Let the government arrest us’: India’s farmers will plant more illegal glyphosate-tolerant cotton to protest GM crop restrictions

It is illegal to grow [herbicide-tolerant Bt (HTBt)] cotton in India since the Government has not cleared it for commercial cultivation. During the current crop year to June and the previous one, farmers in some parts of the country had defied the Government in cultivating HTBt cotton.

In Maharashtra, where cotton is cultivated in 29 percent of the total land under Kharif cultivation, farmers planted the illegal variety on 25-35 per cent of the area. Farmers in Gujarat, Telangana and Andhra, too, grew HTBt cotton this season.

The HTBt cotton can withstand the effect of the herbicide that is sprayed on the weeds. In particular, farmers use Glyphosate herbicide to control the weeds but it is banned by some States such as Kerala.

Environmental groups and those opposed to GM technology claim that Glyphosate is harmful to humans and hence HTBt cotton cultivation should not be permitted.

Farmers say the cultivation cost reduces drastically with HTBt seeds as they can spray herbicides to eliminate weeds without damage to cotton crop and save labour cost required to pull out weeds that reduce the yield.

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Earlier cases of the sale of illegal HTBt cotton seeds have been reported in the districts of Nagpur, Chandrapur, Parbhani, Nandurbar, Yavatmal, Bhandara and Gadchiroli of Maharashtra.

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