65,000 Bangladeshi farmers now grow GMO insect-resistant eggplant as production soars among local farms

In 2020/21, more than 65,000 farmers in Bangladesh used genetically modified Bt aubergines. A rapid increase since the GM crop was approved for cultivation in 2013. The farmers have to spray far fewer insecticides, can harvest more and their income has also increased significantly. This was the result of several studies accompanying the cultivation, which were carried out by scientists involved in the Bt eggplant project *South Asia Eggplant Improvement Partnership* .

Eggplants, also known as brinjal, are a cheap and popular vegetable in Bangladesh. They are grown on around 50,000 hectares by 150,000 small farmers for local markets. One pest in particular is causing problems for farmers: the aubergine fruit borer. The moths damage young shoots and flowers, their larvae bore into the fruit of the plants, which are then difficult to market. Large amounts of insecticides are therefore usually applied – 80 sprays or more, in some regions even 140 or more. And yet the harvest losses are high and range between 30 and 90 percent.

Several studies accompanying the cultivation show why more and more farmers are deciding in favor of the Bt aubergine: Bt aubergines yield significantly more than conventional varieties and lead to additional income for the farmers. A recent publication reports 19.6 percent more yield and 21.7 percent higher revenue (Shelton et al. 2020), another study even a 51 percent increase in yield and 128 percent higher net revenue (Akhter et al. 2020).

[Editor’s note: This article has been translated from German and edited for clarity]

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