

## India's highest court weighs approval of GM mustard, its first biotech food crop

The row over transgenic crops in India is back. On 18 October, India's Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) approved the evaluation, in open fields, of genetically modified (GM) mustard, a source of cooking oil — a key step on the path to commercial-scale cultivation. But a network of organizations that opposes GM crops is contesting the approval.

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If the apex court upholds the GEAC decision, it would be a first for a GM food crop in India — a major step that could improve food security in what will soon be the world's most populous nation, amid the challenges of global warming. But India has a history of protracted legal wrangling over such decisions. Will India ever allow transgenic food crops, and if so, when?

Many scientists welcome the decision by the GEAC. The approval paves the way for the application of genetic modification to many other crops, which could lower their cost, says crop geneticist Rakesh Tuli at Panjab University in Chandigarh.

The GEAC has made "a landmark decision" that could clear the way for more GM crops to receive clearance for commercialization, agrees geneticist Deepak Pental, whose team at the University of Delhi developed and tested the GM mustard crop in question. "More importantly, the decision will encourage scientists both in the public and private sector to develop better varieties and hybrids which can cope with pests and predicted vagaries of the weather due to global warming."

Whether India's apex court will agree with these scientists is unknown.

[\*\*This is an excerpt. Read the original post here\*\*](#)