

GM mustard to remain in a deep freezer for now

<https://www.biovoicenews.com/gm-mustard-to-remain-in-a-deep-freezer-for-now/>

By : BioVoice Correspondent - May 28, 2018



New Delhi: Like its cousin, the comatose Bt Brinjal, the genetically modified (GM) Mustard too is a favourite child of controversy within Indian agriculture sciences policy. It has gone into the circles and is rotating since then with no clarity for stability ever.

The latest round of heightened controversy around GM mustard started last year on 11th May 2017 when Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), the apex authority for assessing the safety of GM crops, declared that GM mustard had passed the prescribed tests and recommended to the environment minister that he should approve it. However, after the untimely demise of then Environment Minister, Anil Madhav Dave on 18th May, the matter got delayed for months. Five months later, on October 10, 2017, the new minister, Dr Harsh Vardhan sent the issue back to GEAC as he received fresh petitions seeking further reviews.

A year later on 14th May 2018, the minutes of the meeting of GEAC posted on the site hasn't

still given any positive signal regarding approval for commercial cultivation of the GM mustard hybrid developed by a team of Delhi University scientists.

Earlier GEAC in its meeting held on 21st March 2018, sought data on the impact of the hybrid on honeybees, other pollinators and soil microbes. The regulator decided that the applicant may be advised to undertake field demonstration on GM mustard' in five acres at two-three different locations to generate additional data on honey bees and other pollinators and honey, and on soil microbial diversity.

After detailed discussion and keeping in view that the application has been referred back to GEAC for re-examination, the committee agreed that the applicant may be advised to undertake field demonstration in an area of 5 acres at 2-3 different locations subject to the conditions proposed in recommendations of Sub-committee on GM Mustard, accepted by GEAC in its 133rd meeting, for the purpose of generating additional data on effect of GM Mustard on honey bees and other pollinators and honey, and on soil microbial diversity. Towards this, the applicant may submit a detailed protocol to GEAC for its consideration and approval.

It is important to note that the GEAC has met eight times on GM mustard since an application for environmental or commercial release was made in September 2015 by a team of scientists of the Delhi University, led by its former vice-chancellor, Deepak Pental.

Given the pressure from both right and left political ideologies, the government seems to be in no mood to take any decision on allowing the GM Mustard. At least not the time till elections are over. And no guarantee that it will see the light of the day even after that.

“The delay in the release of GM Mustard is not based on science or logic but political compulsions. It is unfortunate that it is happening in a country like India where the millions have to be fed with shrinking agriculture fields. The innovation should not be stifled like this. The government must realize and take bold steps,” remarked a Bengaluru based scientist on the basis of anonymity.

Meanwhile, the ‘Coalition against GM’ that is advocating for a ban on GM crops in its letter to Dr Harsh Vardhan has stated that just asking the applicant to undertake a field demonstration for data generation on three parameters “is inadequate and objectionable.”

The GM Mustard has found its resting place for now. No, not the lush yellow and green agriculture fields but the deep freezer where the Bt Brinjal too is taking a nap close to a decade now. The wait it appears has to be unending!