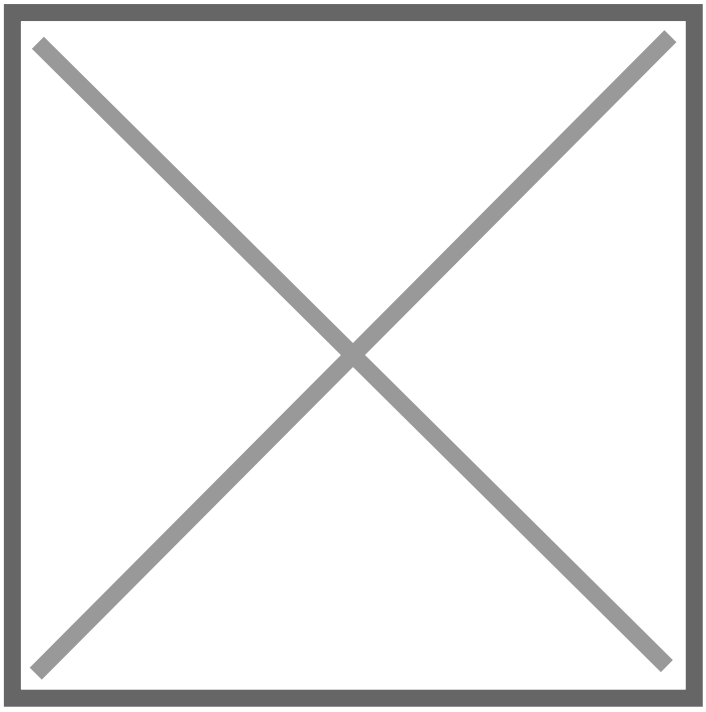
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GEAC approves 17 Bt crops for trials

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Even as the moratorium announced by Environment Ministry against Bt brinjal in February 2010 continues, the biotech regulator has approved field trials of 17 new genetically modified (GM) crops in the country, bringing smiles to the BioAgri industry and frown on the faces of anti-GM activists. The Genetic Engineering Appraisal committee (GEAC) in its 100th meeting held on May 12, 2010, gave permission to confined field trials of 17 transgenic crops expressing new genes. GEAC considered 17 applications from various organizations including many publicly funded institutes and few companies, and granted permission to all of them for the field trials of the transgenic crops under confined conditions. Earlier the Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) had recommended all these applications to GEAC. In this meeting, GEAC gave go ahead for confined field trials to analyze the effect of Azotobacter mutant strains on wheat in terms of yield, protein content, and biomass by National Research Centre on Plant Biotechnology (NRCPB), Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi. Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR), Bangalore was granted permission by GEAC to conduct event selection trials on five transgenic crops. Those include the transgenic watermelon, resistant to Watermelon Bud Necrosis Virus (WBNV); transgenic tomato (Lycopersicon esculentum L), resistant to Tospo virus (Peanut Bud Necrosis Virus: PBNV); transgenic tomato (Lycopersicon esculentum L), resistant to Tomato Leaf Curl Virus (TLCV); transgenic tomato (Lycopersicon esculentum L) with combined resistant to Tomato leaf Curl Virus (TLCV) and Tospo (Peanut Bud Necrosis Virus: PBNV:PBNV); and transgenic papaya for evaluating disease resistance and yield. The regulatory body also gave its nod to conduct event selection of transgenic hybrid Rice (Oryza sativa L.) SPT maintainer by M/s. E. I. DuPont India Private Limited, Hyderabad. Permission to conduct event selection trials on transgenic Sugarcane (Saccharum L.) containing cry-1Ab gene for borer resistance by Sugarcane Breeding Institute (ICAR), Coimbatore was also granted. The permission to conduct event selection trials on transgenic Sorghum (Sorghum biocolor L. Moench) containing mtID gene for drought and salinity tolerance by Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture (ICAR) , Hyderabad was also given. The committee gave permission to conduct Bio-safety Research Level-1 (BRL-1) second year field trial on two transgenic corn hybrids namely Hishell and 900M Gold containing stacked events MON 89034 & NK603 at 11 SAU by Monsanto India, New Delhi. Also, the extension was granted for second year BRL-1 trials of transgenic corn hybrids to two more locations during Rabi 2010 by Monsanto. Bayer Biosciences, Gurgaon was granted permission to conduct event selection trials on 56 transgenic rice events containing cry1Ab, cry1Ca and bar genes. Again the permission was given for trials of transgenic potato resistant to Potato Virus Y by Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi. Also the permission to conduct Biosafety Research Level-1 (BRL-1) trials on two transgenic maize hybrids namely 30V92HR and 30B11HR with indigenously produced seeds containing cry1F & PAT and CP4EPSPS genes (TC1507XNK603 (DAS-01507-1) X MON-00603-6) at seven SAUs by Pioneer Overseas Corporation, Hyderabad Bejo Sheetal Seeds, Jalna was permitted to conduct Biosafety Research Levels (BRL-I) second season trials with Bt Brinjal hybrids expressing cry1Fa1 gene (event 142) and Bt Brinjal hybrids expressing cry1Fa1 gene (event 142) for production of leaves and fruits of Bt Brinjal for sub-chronic feeding studies. GEAC also gave permission to Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company Ltd. (MAHYCO) to conduct Biosafety Research Trials (BRL-II) on Bollgard II X Roundup Ready Flex (BGIIRRF) cotton hybrids containing cry1Ac &cry2Ab and CP4EPSPS (events MON 15985XMON 8913). Besides these approvals for conducting trials, the committee in the follow up action on Review of Bt Brinal Event EE-I also discussed and decided that the Chairman of GEAC will convene a meeting with eminent scientists and experts and members of GEAC in July 2010 to deliberate on the need for additional studies to assess the safety of Bt brinjal Event EE-1. The meeting is

supposed to discuss the requirement of additional studies and the required protocols and procedures to be followed. It was also decided that the review on Bt brinjal will be science based and would be completed in a time bound manner. Rahul Kaul in New Delhi