

Studies reveal higher yields of GM hybrid mustard

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According to independent studies carried out by the Indian Council for Agricultural Research, the genetically modified hybrid mustard seeds provide higher yields than the best comparable non-modified seeds across different regions. It is estimated that using these hybrid seeds will result in higher mustard oil production, giving the farmer more income of at least Rs 3,000 a hectare. These seeds have gone through nine years of research and extensive tests in fifty locations across five states. Given India's poor productivity of mustard seeds, with a national average of 941 kg/hectare, against an international average of double this amount, it is important to take all steps to increase India's productivity of this important crop.

Increasing domestic production of mustard oil is important because India imports a lot of edible oil (in 2001-02, imports totaled more than Rs 6,500 crore). The Indian Farmers and Industry Alliance (IFIA) believes that any step that will result in higher domestic production of edible oil needs to be encouraged.

IFIA recognizes that mustard is consumed by humans, whereas cotton is not. However, it says that studies conducted on GM mustard have shown that the crop is safe and that it has the same nutritional parameters as ordinary mustard. IFIA says, "India's biotech industry has now reached take-off stage. A lot of research is taking place; investments are flowing into the sector; governments, especially state governments, are backing biotech in a big way. However, regulatory barriers still remain that prevent the sustained growth of this industry. Clearing GM mustard will send a big signal to India's biotech industry that the hard work of Indian scientists is translating into products that are profitable both to their users and to the companies, both Indian and foreign, that invest in research and production."