

ABLE-AG welcomes GEAC's move to allow field trials of GM crops

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ABLE-AG, the agriculture biotechnology industry body says that it is encouraged by the green signal received from the GEAC administered by Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) for conducting research field trials of agriculture biotechnologies; these will offer farmers access to in-the-seed choices for insect protection, salt tolerance, weed management, water use efficiency, and nitrogen use efficiency in castor, rice, maize, cotton, and wheat. The applicants can now go ahead with planting once the states also give the required No-Objection certificates.

Dr N. Seetharama, executive director, ABLE -AG told BioSpectrum, "The industry has suffered losses both in terms of investments and enthusiasm. There has been enough negativity on the GM crops. It can be a good start as it takes ten to twelve years to develop the final product. There are so many processes involved including the regulatory approvals from the state governments as well. Therefore, the clearances are most welcome."

The 117th meeting of GEAC, which was held in March, 2013 after the committee was reconstituted in February 2013, published its decisions to permit research field trials of castor by the Directorate of Oilseeds Research (an ICAR institution); in rice which offers insect protection, and salt tolerance from Bayer, BASF, Mahyco; in maize which offers insect protection, and/or weed management from Monsanto; in cotton which offers weed management, and/or water use efficiency, and/or nitrogen use efficiency from Bayer, Mahyco, and Central Institute of Cotton Research (CICR); and in wheat which offers weed management by Mahyco.

The industry has been urging the MoEF to expedite clearance of research field trials to ensure timely sowing during this Kharif (wet season). ABLE-AG had written to Minister of Environment Smt. Jayanthi Natarajan, and GEAC Chairman and Additional Secretary of MoEF Shri Hem Pande urging them to personally consider timely research did not cost our nation an entire season, informed Dr Seetharama.

"We welcome and thank the minister for this decision. This research is in India for India. In addition, our member company researchers are seriously engaged to offer Indian farmers more innovative technologies and choices to optimize their yields, income, and convenience, while reducing their risks when farming. We hope the GEAC administered by MOEF will meet soonest to consider the remaining 53 pending applications for research field trials planned by the Indian private and public sector researchers," said Dr Seetharama.

With the early onset of monsoon, researchers are finding it a challenge to plant these trials during this kharif in some northern states due to delayed publishing of the minutes of GEAC. However, they are hopeful of planting some research field trials in the Southern States, and continuing research smoothly hereon.