

## Anti-GM apprehensions are misplaced, says Pawar

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The union minister for agriculture, Mr Sharad Pawar has once again openly raised his voice in support of genetically modified crops. Addressing a national conference on 'Doubling Food Production in Five Years' at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi on February 1, 2013, Mr Pawar said, "Increase in agricultural production would have to come mainly from enhancement in farm productivity in the existing cultivated area. I am of the firm opinion that we must adopt the modern scientific solutions which are based on sound and proven practices. We also cannot afford to curtail the vigor of our scientific community if they are conducting research with all the precautions. We should not get carried away by the misplaced apprehensions against the scientifically proven developments (such as GM crops)."

The minister stated that India will need to ensure sustainable agricultural growth against the limited availability of natural resources, especially cultivable land. About the question regarding the challenges before Indian agriculture, he said, "Our farmers have the enormous task of feeding a billion plus population. Increased focus on enhancing agricultural production has its own challenges, on account of progressive fragmentation of land holdings, depleting natural resource base and emerging concerns of climate change."

The minister highlighted the role of the private sector and drew the attention of the conference to the need for sustainability and farmers' profitability. He said, "Private sector seed companies have made contributions by introducing frontier technology which has truly revolutionized yields in some crops. Further research needs to be carried forward for securing breakthroughs in yields in dry land farming conditions faced with biotic and abiotic stresses. Private sector also needs to come forward in innovative ways, like custom hiring facilities for farm machines. The government would be supportive of public-private partnership in agriculture and the framework for facilitation has been put in place. Private sector companies have very large dealership networks in rural areas and training of dealers can be considered with a view to bolster extension machinery in dissemination of technology and information."

The president of India, Mr Pranab Mukherjee who earlier inaugurated the conference said, "With a growing population, the

challenge before us is not only to ensure that the indicators of food security do not deteriorate, but instead show improvement." He emphasized that food production therefore deserves high priority in our national policy formulation.