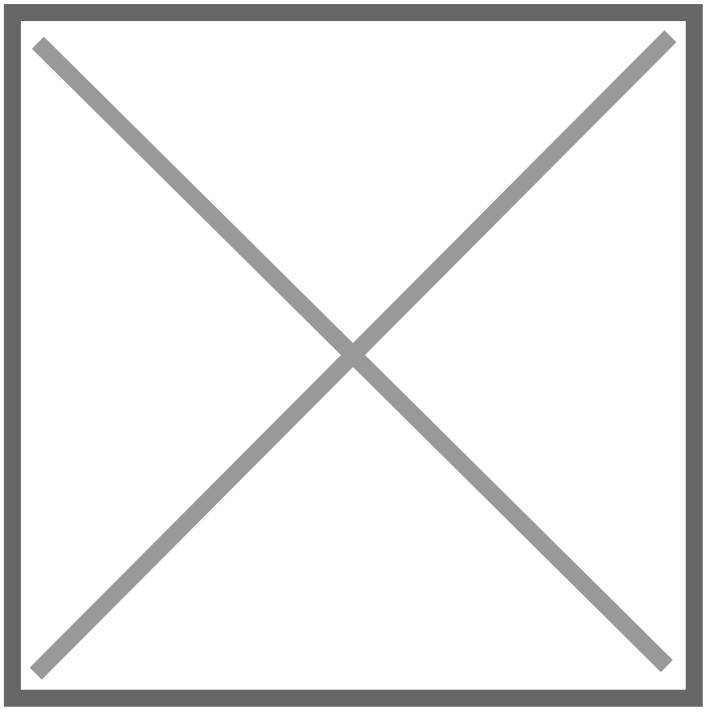
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"If we facilitate seed industry, we facilitate growth in agriculture"

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"If we facilitate seed industry, we facilitate growth in agriculture"

-Dr Govind Garg, director, R&D, Krishidhan Seeds

How do you think biotechnology will play a role in seed development in future and what is the status of its R&D at Krishidhan?

Krishidhan visualizes biotechnology to be one of the major drivers for improving crop productivity. Biotech permits fastest improvement of the best genotypes available and the day is not far when biotechnology in its various forms will not only assist in rapid development of varieties in monogenic traits, but also be able to manipulate polygenic traits, which influence productivity and quality. Biotechnology is also being recognized as a major tool for creating diversity, which is getting limited due to senseless destruction of environment through pollution and deforestation. We feel that the environment is not threatened by biotechnology. On the contrary, biotechnology mitigates the bad effects of environmental pollution and defends biodiversity. With this belief, we have established a state-of-the-art biotechnology research center where we are investigating and engineering crops with biotic and abiotic stress tolerance. We have few innovative traits and molecular assisted breeding support services in pipeline.

How important are R&D activities for a seed company? What are the various R&D initiatives undertaken by Krishidhan?

R&D activity at Krishidhan started in 1990. In last five years, extensive applied research efforts have been invested to design and develop products that can meet farmer's expectations and provide better performance and value. There has to be a win-win situation where agriculture must lead to economic empowerment of farmers through better productivity and consumer satisfaction with better quality and assure rural employment to agriculture labor and scientific personnel in an organized fashion. This cannot be achieved unless there is a continued effort for better products which can be developed, produced and marketed in an organized sector like that a seed company. So, having in-house R&D is very crucial for any seed company like ours. We believe that for a functional R&D, support from the government and other financial institutions is a prerequisite. There is need to have synergy rather than competitiveness between public and private sectors.

What are the prospects of cotton hybrids in India?

Cotton being a carbohydrate-based product, it attracts many diseases and pests that reduce its productivity. Farmers in past have found solutions through use of insecticide and pesticide which could provide only temporarily relief and caused more of environmental and health hazard than sustained benefits. As a consequence, both the cotton cultivation and textile industries suffered in India. It is evident from history that Punjab and many other places of the ginning factories became defunct and India's cotton productivity observed a serious loss. One Bt trait has not only revived cotton production but has made even textile industries to become very vibrant and demanding. The cotton productivity has grown from 300 lint kg per hectare to

more than 500 kgs per hectare in less than five years with the introduction of Bt cotton. It has also triggered race for development of better genotypes that should see cotton productivity going even higher through improved cotton hybrids both in Bt and non-Bt base.

What policy initiatives, in your opinion should be considered by the government for the seed industry to unleash its true potential?

I think this is an important question. I have shifted from public sector to private sector after having a rich experience of 35 years service in public sector. I must confess that my view of looking at seed industries were different while serving in the public sector. Like others I also always thought seed industry as a bundle of money and driven by people with greed to make fast money. It is only after joining a seed company that I developed better appreciation for seed companies in general and Krishidhan in particular. Ever since the introduction of Bt cotton, there has been ever increasing demand for better products from farmers. The turnover of Krishidhan has increased every year. It has to be realized that company gets its products produced by the farmers. Only then it undertakes processing and packaging to add proper value to make it a quality seed which is to be used by farmers. We have to maintain a very delicate balance between the procurement price, which has to be high enough to motivate growers for seed production and selling price has to be reasonable so as to attract farmers for better product. Often people think only about farmers but fail to think about of necessity of a healthy seed industry with same intensity as without the services of seed industry, it will be difficult or I will say impossible, to attain a required growth in agriculture for food security and prosperity of farmers.

Nayantara Som