

India can increase its agri yield by adopting new technologies

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Prof. Abhijit Sen, member of the Planning Commission, Government of India, has predicted that the agriculture growth for the fiscal 2010-11 is unlikely to show improvements as it is going to stay negative in current fiscal.

Inaugurating the Green Revolution II Summit organised by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), Prof. Sen said, “Kharif has been badly damaged because of poor monsoon and hurt agriculture production substantially in 2009-10. The rabi, which was expected to compensate for lost kharif production in ongoing fiscal is also facing problems because of rise in temperature, which might kill its foreseen higher yield prospects.”

On Bt technology, Prof. Sen categorically stated that its applications on non-food items such as Bt cotton has been excellent. However, its application on food items be subjected to wider consultation as it is not a matter of science but a subject to people's confidence and accordingly government should take a decision on its applications on Indian soil.

Prof. Sen endorsed observations of renowned Indian scientist, Prof. MS Swaminathan, who in his keynote speech squarely blamed executors of government policies on agriculture front due to which, Indian agriculture has suffered.

Prof. Swaminathan predicted that India is heading for drought. Initiatives are needed to hold back majority of Indian population adhere to agriculture by giving them remunerative prices, good seeds, better infrastructure and knowledge of technologies.

Prof. Sen, however, said that there could be shortfall in the agriculture growth even in the next fiscal but the government will be able to maintain the projected growth rate of over four percent for agriculture sector by the time 11th Five Year Plan period

gets over. He said that in the 12th Five Year Plan period, the government is determined to release a grant of Rs 6,000 crore to 600 districts across the country so that farmers are taught application of technology to improve their agriculture yield.

Dr William S Niebur, vice president, Crop Genetics R&D, DuPont, said that with the adoption of modern technologies, India can increase its yield of agriculture produce and feed its population at reasonably lower prices. Soil fertility in India has come down and not many praiseworthy steps were taken after first Green Revolution to increase the fertility, he pointed out.

Therefore, India needs to forge alliances to improve land fertility and farmers skills to increase food grain production and thereby ensure food security of India, said Dr Swati Piramal, president ASSOCHAM. She was addressing the gathering.

Obama opts for lower data exclusivity for biosimilars

Faced with vehement criticism for a slackened approach to his much talked about healthcare reform bill, US President Barack Obama recently voiced his opinion on a data exclusivity period of less than 12 years. Sources from the industry claim that the data exclusivity period could zero down to as short as seven years. The focus being bringing down healthcare costs. While on one hand, this means doomsday for innovator biotech companies, on the other hand, it will accelerate the growth of Indian biosimilar companies.

Data exclusivity for a drug begins right from the time when the drug is approved. Until this data exclusivity period comes to an end, no generic company can bring out a biosimilar version of the innovator drug. Hence, for a 12-year exclusivity period, Indian biosimilar companies would have to wait for 12 years, before they can take their products to the US market. "The US market for biopharmaceuticals is expected to touch \$60 billion (Rs 2.77 lakh crore) in another one to two years. If a seven year data exclusivity period comes about and the biosimilars market opens up in the US, it could mean huge business for Indian companies," said a well-known industry expert in India.

Presently there are 25 companies in India operating in the biosimilar space. This includes companies like Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Ranbaxy, Biocon, Shantha Biotech, Intas Biopharmaceuticals and Reliance Life Sciences. It has been estimated that around 40 biosimilar products are being sold in the Indian market.

Obama's move has spurred huge protests from the big biotech bandwagon. BIO which represents more than 1,200 members from the biotech fraternity was vouching for a 12-year period and is now vehemently opposing the President's stance saying that this will reduce incentives for bio-research, innovation and access to 'powerful biologic drugs'. Jim Greenwood, CEO of BIO in a note also mentioned that the biosimilar provision for the date exclusivity was approved not just by both the parties but by universities, patient groups and venture capitalists alike.

Biocon, Bayer tie-up to fight diabetes in India

Indian biotechnology major, Biocon and Bayer Healthcare, a subsidiary of Bayer AG, have entered into a strategic partnership to fight the diabetes menace in India. Diabetes is a global pandemic with nearly 23 crore diabetics worldwide. India is the diabetes capital of the world with home to over five crore of the world's diabetics. By 2025, one in five diabetics worldwide is likely to be an Indian.

As part of Biocon's unique patient service initiative branded as 'Winning with diabetes', the strategic tie-up with Bayer Healthcare entails bringing the latest hi-tech blood glucose meters branded as 'Breeze2', to the masses in India. This initiative follows the mantra that self monitoring of blood glucose (SMBG) is the most important part of diabetes management. Good control of blood glucose and its regular monitoring help the doctor prescribe medication in a better way, reduce the risk of diabetes-related complications, improve HbA1c levels and allow early identification of low blood sugar.

As an introductory offer, and to promote SMBG as a mass concept, Bayer's Breeze2 imported blood glucose meter will be given to select patients on doctor's recommendation.

Bharat Bio vaccine doses cross 1bn mark

Bharat Biotech announced that it has delivered its one billionth vaccine dose. Bharat Biotech is a global manufacturer of vaccines to protect against rabies, polio, hepatitis B, typhoid, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, haemophilus influenza B and other diseases.

"This is a symbolic moment for Bharat Biotech, since it documents our past performance while laying the foundation for our future growth," said Dr Krishna M Ella, chairman and managing director, Bharat Biotech.

"While the manufacture and sale of a billion doses give us a great sense of pride and accomplishment, we at Bharat Biotech realize that life saving vaccines are still unavailable to millions of people and there is a lot more work to be done. We

are truly committed to R&D of innovative vaccines to address global infectious diseases," added Dr Ella.

Intas wins IDMA award for quality excellence

Intas Biopharmaceuticals has received GOLD Award for Quality Excellence from Indian Drug Manufacturer's Association (IDMA). The awards were presented by BS Jharwar, chairman, National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) and Devender Choudhary, joint secretary, Department of Pharmaceuticals.

Intas has received a GOLD trophy from IDMA for the second time in a row as it received this award for quality excellence consecutively in 2008 and 2009.

Genus opens its subsidiary in India

Genus, one of the largest animal genetics companies in the world, has launched its operation in India through its subsidiary, Genus India, on February 8, 2010. Genus is active in cattle breeding through its brand, American Breeders Service (ABS), founded in 1941. The subsidiary based in Pune has plans to increase the productivity of Indian dairy animals through supply of superior genetics to ensure that the calves born have increased productive life with better profitability for the dairy farmers.

Quebec looks for partnerships in India

The Canadian province, Quebec, seeks collaborations with Indian companies and research institutes in the areas of science and technology. A 130-member delegation, led by Quebec Premier, Jean Charest, toured India from January 31 to February 6, 2010. The Premier inaugurated the Quebec trade office and the office of Invest Quebec, an economic development agency from Quebec, in Mumbai.

The participants of the mission were from various sectors, such as life sciences, aerospace, infrastructure, and environment. The mission, which also visited Bangalore had over 180 B2B meetings with Indian companies. The mission was also accompanied by representatives from Quebec's world class research institutes such as Foundation on Antivirals, FRQS (Fonds de la recherche en sant  du Qu bec) and G nome Qu bec.

Gates Foundation funds vaccine development

The Gates Foundation has made a 10-year commitment to provide funding for research and development of vaccines in developing countries. This was announced by the Microsoft Founder, Bill Gates and his wife, Melinda, at the World Economic Forum held in Davos this year.

Bill Gates announced that the Gates Foundation would invest \$10 billion for the development of vaccines within the next 10 years. In addition, the Gates Foundation would support a couple of immunization programs especially in the developing nations of the world. The funding will target research and development of vaccines for diseases like malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. For this it has inked partnerships with the UNICEF, WHO, the GAVI alliance and a couple of vaccine companies.

After the Davos forum 2010, Gates posted an interesting note in context to his announcement, "I have always believed in the miracle of vaccines. My recent travels along with progress on things like a malaria vaccine have convinced me to shift more of the foundation's global health resources to vaccine research and delivery. As a big believer in innovation, I see vaccines as a fascinating example of a high-risk idea with a huge pay-off."