

With GEAC back in action, govt pushes for field trials of GM crops

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The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), under the MoEF has, so far, cleared 60 proposals for the GM crops at various stages of trials this year.

In a meeting of the GEAC held recently, the committee took up the proposals that were pending over the past year. The meeting was also attended by representatives of respective companies. The GEAC has cleared trials of 15 GM crops for stage one trials on a one-acre plot. There are as many as 20 GM crops already undergoing trials at various stages. As per reports, the proposals cleared recently were for Rabi crops while the cases of Kharif crops were cleared in previous rounds of meetings.

It is worthwhile to note that the committee had not met between March 2013 and March 2014 but has now already met thrice since then. *BioSpectrum* in an exclusive report in its March issue, had reported about the failure of the two previous environment ministers to hold a balanced view on the matter as well as clear scientific evaluation on the issue.

A Supreme Court technical expert committee had last year recommended an indefinite moratorium on the field trials of GM crops till the government came out with a proper regulatory and safety mechanism. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, in a report in August 2012, had asked for a ban on GM food crops in the country.

There has been an ongoing debate over the introduction of GM crops, with one huge lobby of activists, farmers and political parties opposing it and calling it unsafe. At the same time, the government agriculture ministers, public and private scientists were batting for it and saying that it is important for the country's food security.

In India, so far, cotton is the only GM crop which is legally allowed for commercial release and there is a moratorium on bt brinjal since February, 2010. It was placed by the then environment minister Mr Jairam Ramesh, following a protest from civil society activists.

