

## Biosafety tests of GM crops a necessity: WHO

16 March 2015 | News | By Rahul Koul Koul

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In order to build awareness about food safety among various stakeholders, the World Health Organization on 13 March 2015, organized a technical briefing for mediapersons. The event, held in Delhi, was for discussing the theme of World Health Day 2015, 'From farm to Plate, keep food safe'

Various speakers representing WHO, Food Standards and Safety Authority of India (FSSAI), and National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) presented on their respective roles in ensuring awareness about the need to have safe food.

Replying to a question raised by BioSpectrum on WHO's position on GM crops, the WHO's representative maintained that GM crops should be evaluated extensively and the balance must be maintained. Since there is a foreign gene being inserted in to a plant genome, it is the matter of choice for consumers but we believe that can be done after proper tests. "FAO/WHO Codex guidelines exist for risk analysis of GM food. We have been a part of consultations at the multiple levels and will continue to give our inputs whenever required. We are working on it," she said while speaking on the occasion.

Dr Anil Kumar, additional director, NCDC, Delhi gave insights about the role of organization in providing quick response to the outbreaks. He added, "The institute was, in addition, expected to provide expertise to the States and Union Territories (UTs) on rapid health assessment and laboratory based diagnostic services. Surveillance of communicable diseases and outbreak investigation also formed an indispensable part of its activities."

"The challenge for food regulators is to maintain a food regulatory system that delivers safe food for the population, enables consumers to make informed choices and also maintains public confidence in the food regulations," mentioned the FSSAI representative.

At present, the global instruments to ensure food safety and public health includes the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005; INFOSAN which is International Food Safety Network of food safety authorities managed jointly by FAO & WHO for information exchange and cooperation. Besides that there is CODEX Alimentarius, the Global standards setting based on scientific evidence concerning hygienic and nutritional quality of food (WHO & FAO joint program).