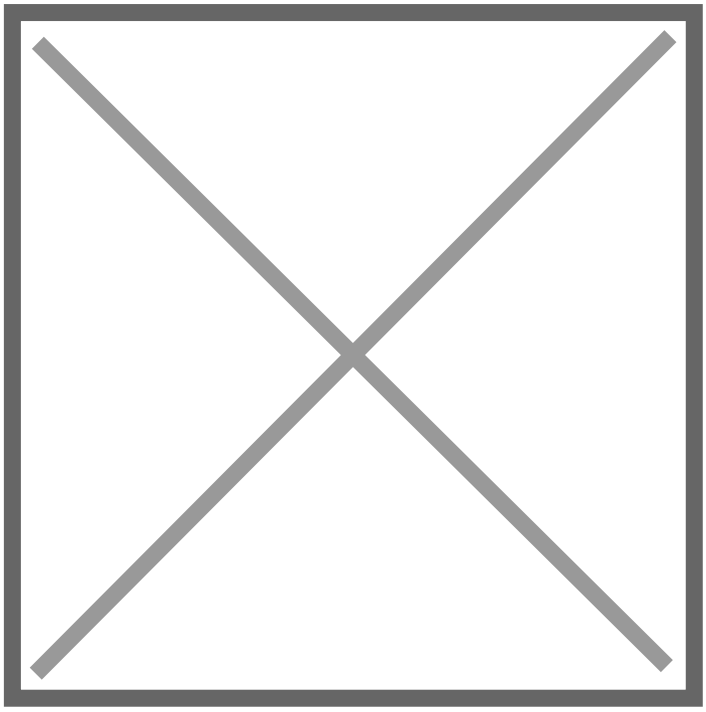
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Farmers urge GEAC to approve GM mustard

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The Indian Farmers and Industry Alliance (IFIA), an association of farmers' organizations and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), has urged the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) to approve the use of genetically modified mustard.

Chengal Reddy, co-chairman, IFIA said, "Indian farmers need to compete with those in the rest of the world. They should not be denied the technology that allows them to compete. The farmers are looking forward to getting a better income from mustard, especially farmers in rainfed areas in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, where the productivity is low."

He said the studies conducted by the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) showed that these genetically modified hybrid mustard seeds provide higher yields than the best comparable non-modified seeds across different regions. It is estimated that using these hybrid seeds will result in higher mustard oil production, giving the farmer higher income of at least Rs 3,000 /hectare. He noted that the studies also observed that GM mustard is safe and it has the same nutritional parameters as ordinary mustard. Hence, he said, IFIA recognizes that mustard is safe for human consumption.

He maintained that India's biotech industry has now reached a take-off stage. A lot of research is taking place; investments are flowing into the sector; governments, especially state governments, are backing biotech in a big way. However, regulatory barriers still remain that prevent the sustained growth of this industry.

Clearing GM mustard will send a big signal to Indian biotech industry that the hard work of Indian scientists is translating into products that are profitable both to their users and to the companies, both Indian and foreign, that invest in research and production. However, he cautioned the seed companies that they should support the farmers by giving them continuous information and technical advice, even after selling the seeds.