



Demand for Import of Genetically Modified Soy Seeds

Why in News

The **poultry industry is demanding** a permit for the **import of crushed genetically modified (GM) soy seeds for captive consumption of farmers** from the Central government.

- **Non-fiscal and fiscal relief measures** which include the restructuring of term loans and additional working capital **has also been demanded** from the Centre and State governments.

What is a GM crop?
A crop which has a gene artificially inserted into it from another species, even unrelated, to give it some desired properties. GM crops are mostly either pest-resistant or herbicide-tolerant

Are there other GM crops in India?
No, the government has not approved commercial cultivation of other GM crops, though efforts have been made for brinjal and mustard

**GM CROPS IN INDIA
A PRIMER**

When did India get its first GM crop?
The first GM crop variety approved for commercialisation was Bt cotton. Bollgard-I, which provided immunity against the pink bollworm and developed by Monsanto, was given the go ahead in 2002. Monsanto released Bollgard-II in 2006. India has become the world's largest producer of cotton partly due to Bt cotton, which accounts for over 90% of the total cotton acreage in the country

Key Points

- **GM Crops:**
 - A **GM or transgenic crop** is a plant that has a novel combination of genetic material obtained through the use of modern biotechnology.
 - For example, a GM crop can contain a gene(s) that has been artificially inserted instead of the plant acquiring it through pollination.
 - **Conventional plant breeding** involves crossing of species of the same genus to provide the offspring with the desired traits of both parents.
 - Genus is a class of items such as a group of animals or plants with similar traits, qualities or features.

- **Cross breeding** can take a long time to achieve desired results and frequently, characteristics of interest do not exist in any related species.
- **Bt cotton** is the **only GM crop that is allowed in India**. It has alien genes from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) that allows the crop to develop a protein toxic to the common pest **pink bollworm**.
- **Herbicide Tolerant Bt (Ht Bt) cotton**, on the other hand is derived with the insertion of an additional gene, from another soil bacterium, which allows the plant to resist the common herbicide glyphosate.
- In **Bt brinjal**, a gene allows the plant to resist attacks of fruit and shoot borers.
- In **DMH-11 mustard**, genetic modification allows cross-pollination in a crop that self-pollinates in nature.

▪ **Status of GM Soyseeds in India:**

- India allows the import of **GM soybean and canola oil**.
- Import of **GM soya bean seeds** has not been approved in India.

- The main fear is that import of GM soya bean will **affect the Indian soya bean industry by contaminating non-GM varieties**.

▪ **Reasons for the Demand:**

- The outbreak of **Covid-19** has created a massive crisis which led to an **initial depletion of demand in chicken products** owing to false news about the linkage between the virus and poultry products.
- This created an **unwarranted financial crisis** and led to the erosion of **working capital (used for day-to-day operations)**.
- Since the last several months, high speculation activities in soya contracts on **National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange Limited (NCDEX)** has been disturbing the sector.

- The NCDEX is an online commodities exchange dealing primarily in agricultural commodities in India.
- The **rise in the soybean process** had led to the **skyrocketing of prices of eggs and chicken products** in the retail market.

- The import for the particular time frame will stabilise the raw material market.

▪ **Approval Process for GM crops in India:**

- In India, the **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)** is the apex body that **allows for commercial release of GM crops**.
- Use of the unapproved GM variant can attract a **jail term of 5 years and fine of Rs. 1 lakh** under the **Environment Protection Act, 1986**.
- **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** is the authorised body to **regulate the imported crops in India**.

▪ **Some Related Initiatives:**

◦ **Poultry Venture Capital Fund (PVCF):**

- The **Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying** is implementing it under **“Entrepreneurship development and Employment generation” (EDEG)** of the **National Livestock Mission**.
- It is a bankable programme and the Central Government is providing subsidy through **National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD)** for those beneficiaries taking loan for PVCF.

◦ **National Livestock Mission:**

- Different programmes under the **National Livestock Mission** under which financial assistance is provided to States/Union Territories for implementation of Rural Backyard Poultry Development (RBPD) and Innovative Poultry Productivity Project (IPPP).

◦ **Assistance to States for Control of Animal Diseases (ASCAD) Scheme:**

- ASCAD under “**Livestock Health and Disease Control**” (LH&DC) which covers the **vaccination of economically important poultry diseases** viz., Ranikhet Disease, Infectious Bursal Disease, Fowl Pox etc., including control and containment of emergent and exotic diseases like Avian Influenza.

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