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GM crops may not resolve food crisis, scientists say

Jayashree Nandi, TNN | Sep 24, 2012, 06.59PM IST

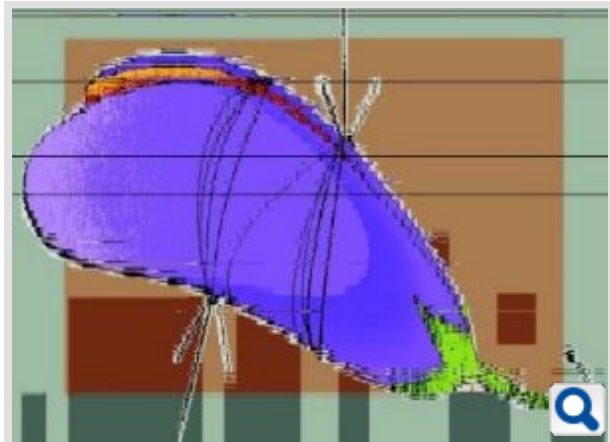
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NEW DELHI: Genetically modified (GM) crops have so far been promoted as the 'breakthrough' technology that will help resolve food insecurity in India. But a group of prominent agricultural scientists, who addressed the media on Monday in Delhi, said that **GM crops** may not help feed India's booming population. They suggested that India use a mix of ecological farming, supported by conventional breeding and make optimum use of local knowledge and natural resources instead.

"How we grow our crops, what kind of crops will be grown, where and by whom are in fact the critical questions", said Prof Hans Herren, Co-chair of International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), who was awarded the World Food Prize in 1995. "India must invest in rural infrastructure and institutions".

The scientists stressed that transgenic approaches are incompatible with sustainable agriculture and livelihoods. "What we really need is a shift in paradigm, where a holistic approach drives our interventions in agriculture without reductionist solutions hogging the centre-stage and taking away precious resources", Herren added.

Dr **Doug Gurian-Sherman** of the Union of Concerned Scientists, USA quoted a study on productivity of transgenic crops in the USA. He said that their studies had shown that conventional breeding and farm management continue to greatly out-perform transgenic technology when it comes to yield improvements.

Another scientist, Professor Jack Heinemann from the School of Biological Sciences, **University of Canterbury** gave the example of South America where GM technology has failed to solve food crisis "Only two countries in the world, both in South America, grow GM on more than

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Scientists say that GM crops may not resolve food crisis.

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40% of their agricultural land and both are suffering from increased food insecurity. Most of their poor neighbors that have not adopted GM have improving food security statistics," he said.

They gave the example of high-tech GMO technology in the USA. "Adopting GM technology has been accompanied by greater consolidation of resources and power for few seed companies, higher seed prices, greater risk for farmers and less choice in varieties with hardly any increase in productivity," they said.

The media briefing by scientists on 'Can GM Crops Meet India's Food Security and Export Markets?' was organized by Aruna Rodrigues, lead petitioner in a public interest litigation seeking moratorium on GM testing in India. Adding to the doubts over the success of GM technology in food is a study by a molecular biologist, Prof Gallis Eric Seralini of University of Caen in France.

It is one of the first studies to be done over the entire lifespan of laboratory rats and is the longest health impact study of genetically modified (GM) crops and herbicides on laboratory animals. Seralini's study was recently published in Elsevier journal, found that herbicide tolerant GM maize treated with and without herbicides had some serious health implications on rats.

There were increased cases of mortality among rats fed with GM corn, increased liver and kidney damages seen in the case of male rats fed with GM corn, increased tumors both in the case of male and female rats that have been fed with GM corn.

Also, the effects were sex dependent with the female rats fed with GM crops, developed mammary tumors and pituitary gland failure.

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