

GM crops no big help in food security

The use of genetically modified crops has not led to any substantial increase in food production, Dr Hans Herren, the president of the Millenium Institute and a World Food Prize laureate said here on Thursday. Speaking at an international scientific conference in the city on 'Can GM crops meet India's food security and export markets?', Dr Herren said that even in the US, the pioneer in genetic modification of crops and one of its earliest adopters, there was only a marginal increase in the yield of 3-4 per cent, while Europe, which has not adopted the technology has registered better yield increase. "While the US maize production in the last 26 years grew at 6-8 per cent, the corresponding growth for Europe stands at 8 to 10 per cent. Agro ecological approach yields better results than transgenic modification," said Dr Herren. "GM is like a band aid solution to farmers' woes, often lacking foresight. We need nutritional food grains, than just starch producing genetically altered variants. While 40 per cent of the US' GM corn production goes for alcohol production (fuel), the rest that is consumed is devoid of vital vitamins and minerals. The best way out would be to shun GM crops and to go for hybrid varieties," said Walter Goldstein of the Mandaamin Institute. A company involved in GM research spends as much as \$136 million to identify and produce a successful transgenic crop variety. "All this expenditure, in addition to lobbying with governments and strong monopoly over seed markets have only resulted in a yield increase of about five per cent globally. Better cropping techniques and hybrid breeding have overtaken it remarkably," added Dr Herren.

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