

Genetic engineering fails to deliver: Studies

Genetic engineering has been hailed as a panacea for the problem of global hunger and population explosion, but research studies reveal that it has failed to deliver the goods. At the same time, it has created more problems than it could solve. The Union of Concerned Scientists, an international research group based in the US, said none of the genetically engineered crops under cultivation so far has boosted farm yield or overcome the problem of drought conditions. “Genetic engineering has actually done very little to increase the yield of food and feed crops. It appears unlikely that this technology will play a leading role in helping the world feed itself in the foreseeable future,” said the Union of Concerned Scientists. In a document — Failure to Yield — released at the CoP-11, the research group reviewed the data on soybeans and corn, the main GE food/feed crops in the USA. “Herbicide-tolerant GE soybeans and corn have not increased yields any more than conventional methods that rely on commonly available herbicides,” the report said. Insect-resistant Bt varieties have provided an average yield advantage of just three to four per cent compared to typical conventional practices. Non-GE farming have increased yields of crops by values ranging from 13 to 25 per cent,” it said. ‘Restrictions on GM crops to impede progress’ The Association of Biotechnology-Led Enterprises (ABLE) stated that agricultural biodiversity should be treated differently from forest biodiversity and that conservation should not hamper progress. This was in the context of the Cartagena Protocol that speaks of the need to preserve biological diversity from risks posed by genetic modifications. In meetings that took place alongside the Meeting of Parties 6, presentations were made on how GM crops had helped farmers and if restrictions were placed on them, progress would be impeded. Several people thought the advantages of GM crops had been overshadowed by negative publicity it had received. “Scaremongers have to be dealt with. Risk management is important,” said Dr N. Seetharama, executive director, ABLE. It was like tiger conservation, he said. “Only people in the urban areas who are thinking about tiger conservation. People in villages who face tigers, think about their lives.” Dr Rajendran, scientist at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, concurred. “Agricultural biodiversity is man-made, while forest biodiversity is natural. After we modify a species, what happens to the original is what needs to be worried about,” he said.

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