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Field Trials of 13 GM Crops Put on Hold

OUR BUREAU
NEW DELHI

Environment minister Prakash Javadekar has said that the government has decided to keep in abeyance the decision by the statutory committee of genetic engineering to allow field trials of 13 genetically modified or GM crops, a clarification that marks a departure from the previous Congress-led UPA government's policy.

Javadekar gave this assurance to representatives of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and Bharat Kisan Sangh at a meeting held on Tuesday.

Both organisations are affiliates of the ruling BJP's ideological mentor Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

The decision is in line with the BJP's poll promise of not allowing genetically modified foods without full scientific evaluation of its long-term effects on soil, production and biological impact on consumers.

In a meeting on July 18, the statutory panel Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee had recommended that field trials be allowed for 13 GM crops including rice, brinjal, chickpea, mustard and cotton. However, the environment minister said soon after on Twitter, "Field trials of GM crops are not a government decision. It is a recommendation of a committee."

The panel's decisions are commendatory in nature and the final decision lies with the environment ministry.



Javadekar assured Swadeshi Jagran Manch & Bharat Kisan Sangh that decision will be taken on basis of scientific research

Javadekar's position is also in sync with that of the science and technology minister Jitendra Singh who had earlier stressed that decisions would be taken on a scientific basis.

"For reasons not convincing, we have tried to rule out scientific reasoning in this issue. We will try to serve science with a scientific approach and we will take decisions with a scientific temper," Singh had said on assuming office.

Besides the party's poll promise, the delegation from the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and Bharat Kisan Sangh drew attention to the 59th report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture, tabled in the 15th Lok Sabha, which recommended "stopping of all field trials under any garb".

The issue of GM crops is pending before the Supreme Court, which is hearing a 2005 public interest litigation by groups of non-governmental organisations led by activist Aruna Rodrigues calling for the government to place a moratorium on biotech crops until new regulations for plant biotechnology are established.

The delegation from the RSS backed outfits also drew attention to the recommendations of the SC-appointed technical expert committee comprising eminent scientists in the field of biotechnology and agriculture. Five of the six experts involved in the report had suggested a moratorium on field trials in the absence of a strong regulatory mechanism in India and strongly opposed any open release of GM crops until a robust regulatory mechanism is put in place.

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