

# India Should Open Agri Sector to US Investment: Embassy Official

## US feels India has a 'lot of interest' in GM crops and consumer anxiety can be overcome

Madhvi.Sally@timesgroup.com

**New Delhi:** The US believes the Indian government has a "lot of interest" in biotechnology and genetically modified crops and said the anxiety of consumers over issues related to altered agricultural produce can be overcome.

Import of GM soyabean, which India doesn't allow, could help meet the country's edible oil and poultry feed requirements, Scott S Sindelar, Minister Counselor for Agricultural Affairs at the US embassy in India, told ET in an interview.

India should open up to US investment in the agriculture sector, Sindelar said, adding that the government's intervention in the cotton seed market could send signals to US investors that may not reflect the opportunities in the country. Earlier this year, the government set a uniform price for Bt cotton seeds across states for the benefit of farmers, a decision that affected Monsanto, the world's largest seed company.

"There is a lot of interest in biotechnology and GM by the Indian government and scientists. I can't speak on behalf of the Indian government and their regulatory system, but like a lot of countries, I think they face concerns from the public. There is anxiety. I guess among Indian consumers," he said.

India's edible oil and poultry industry has recently been discussing the option of importing soyabean, which is relatively cheap in the world markets now and



**Scott S Sindelar, Minister Counselor for Agricultural Affairs at US Embassy in India**

in abundant supply, Sindelar said that soyabean from all major supplier countries is a genetically modified product and not allowed at present in India.

The US is keen to export soyabean to India to increase its earnings from agricultural shipments to the country, which stood at \$1.33 billion in 2015.

"India is short of vegetable oil. It imports \$10 billion a year of vegetable oil. It's also short of protein in meal for the poultry industry, agriculture and dairy industry," he said.

"The Indian government is taking positive steps to address some of the constraints. Some of these constraints are these legacy policies, which grew out of India's early history in the 1960s. So these are valid questions that could

permit changes in some of the legacy programmes that then would allow more market-based solutions to the agriculture sector," Sindelar said.

Asked if the US government had taken up the Monsanto issue with the agriculture ministry, Sindelar said, "Our concern was it sends signals to US investors that may not reflect the opportunities in India. That's our concern."

He said India should open up to US investment in agriculture. US companies such as Cargill, DuPont Pioneer, John Deere, Mondelez and Wal-Mart already operate in India in areas from seed production to finished food products. He said US companies need to feel comfortable with the regulatory environment and protection. "When a major food company invests, they also want to make sure that they can secure supplies of high-quality ingredients, whether the product they produce is for domestic consumption or export," he said.

Sindelar acknowledged that the Indian government is taking steps to address constraints in agriculture growth and development. "The investment in infrastructure - roads, distribution, close look at input subsidy like pilot programme for fertiliser, and the national agriculture market are the right steps in the direction," he said. "When our chief economist was in New Delhi recently, one of the questions posed by India was we would like to hear your experiences of the California drought. That is the kind of issue where we can have a positive discussion with Indian government."

Sumedh, 815116  
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