

# Bt brinjal: GEAC calls for review of biosafety data from Bangladesh

OUR BUREAU

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In a move that could be construed as a baby step towards lifting an eight-year moratorium imposed on commercial cultivation of Bt brinjal, biotechnology regulator GEAC has called for a review of biosafety data available from neighbouring Bangladesh, which has been growing the transgenic variety for last four years.

The GEAC, or Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee, in its latest meeting held on September 20, requested the Bengaluru-based Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR), a constituent lab of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), to obtain "relevant information and data on the post commercial release effects of Bt brinjal in Bangladesh" from the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute.

The GEAC decided this while hearing a request made by Mahyco (developer of transgenic brinjal) seeking permission for large-scale environmental release and demonstration of Bt brinjal. Though the variety received the GEAC nod in 2009, it was subsequently placed under moratorium by the then Environment and Forests Minister Jairam Ramesh. Anti-GM activists and experts objected to the commercial release of the GM variety in India – which is considered the centre of origin and centre of diversity of brinjal – as there were no adequate studies



File photo of a Bt brinjal variety at a trial field of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

to ascertain transgene flows from the GM variety to other wild brinjal relatives. Bangladesh, on the other hand, approved its commercial release in 2013 and has been growing it since.

According to a recent report by agro-biotech lobby group ISAAA, in 2017, over 27,000 farmers have been growing Bt brinjal on 2,400 hectares, nearly 5 per cent of total area under brinjal cultivation in Bangladesh. The transgenic variety is said to resist an attack from a deadly fruit and shoot borer, one of the major insect-pests of brinjal.

The regulator also asked Mahyco to submit reports of "independent studies with regard to post commercial release of Bt brinjal in Bangladesh."