GM Regulations in India

What is the issue?

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- Despite the ban on local production and import of foods having genetically modified (GM) content, GM food has widely penetrated the Indian markets.
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- But this has led to no real health or environmental consequences, which only supports the assertion that GM food is safe.
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What are the shocking regulatory lapses?

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- “Centre for Science and Environment” (CSE) study indicated that as much as 32% of the processed foods marketed in India carry GM ingredients.
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- As GM imports are banned, importers have to currently make a declaration that their goods are free of GM components at the customs.
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- Yet, nearly 80% of the marketed foods that tested GM-positive in the CSE study were imported in contravention of the ban.
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- More significantly, some of the GM products falsely claimed on their labels to be GM-free, which is a clearly spiteful violation to deceive consumers.
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- All this reflects poorly on the country’s GM regulatory systems.
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What is the GM crop scenario in India?

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- Currently, BT cotton is the only approved GM crop for commercial cultivation

in India and it accounts for 90% of the cotton acreage now.
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- While no GM food crop has been permitted thus far, GM foods have already deeply penetrated into the Indian markets.
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- Notably, Cottonseeds (of BT-cotton), which bear GM DNA, are routinely fed to cattle whose milk is part of regular human diet.
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- In recent years, even cottonseed oil has begun to be used as a cooking medium individually or admixed with other edible oils.
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- This oil, if not properly refined, can retain remnants of GM DNA.
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What the differing opinions on GM?

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- The fundamental issue really is the impact that the genetically tweaked foods can have on health and environment.
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- If the vociferous anti-GM lobby argues that “GM Food” can pose wide-ranging hazards but most scientists disagree on this.
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- In fact, there has been no detectable incidence of health or environmental hazard due to GM crops in the past 2 decades (since GM trials began).
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- Also, several scientific studies conducted in the countries where GM crops are extensively farmed and consumed have not found any adverse effect.
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What is the way ahead?

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- Poor regulations in India have resulted in careless sowing of BT-Cotton and the extensive penetration of GM foods into the markets.
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- Despite these serious lapses, hardly any harmful fallout has been observed until now, which is hence a vindication of safety of GM crops.
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- The government should, therefore, take note of these facts and lift the ill-advised embargo on the approval of new GM seeds.
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- The cutting-edge technology of genetic manipulation needs to be put to gainful use for the benefit of farmers, consumers and biotech-based industries.
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Source: Business Standard

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