

Use of Unapproved GM Cotton

What is the issue?

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Unrestrained cultivation of unapproved strains of genetically modified (GM) cotton in several states is a matter of grave concern.

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What is unapproved GM cotton?

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- Many local seed companies have reportedly been mixing out GM cotton seeds by incorporating some of the new genetic traits evolved by corporate seed researchers, without their consent.

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- More than 3.5 million packets of illegitimate seeds of GM cotton were sold in the current season alone.

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- Nearly one million cotton growers may already be using these seeds.

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What can be the adverse impacts of this?

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- In most cases, the illegal seeds carry the new generation gene combination that lends weedicide tolerance in addition to protection against pests (such as bollworms, which is the hallmark of the transgenic Bt-cotton).

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- These attributes allow farmers to control weed by spraying herbicides rather than going in for cost-intensive manual or mechanical means of removing unwanted plants.

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- If the unsolicited genes escape the host plants they can affect the innate genetic make-up of cultivated crops and wild flora.

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- This can jeopardise the future of a potent gene-tailoring technology and several other biotechnology-dependent industrial sectors.

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What is the response of the government in this regard?

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- Due to lack of regulation behind cultivation of unapproved Bt-cotton there was no check on their multiplication, trade or cultivation.

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- This matter has duly been brought to the notice of the authorities concerned, including the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC).

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- Only the Andhra Pradesh government has ordered an inspection of the fields growing unapproved GM cotton seeds.

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- But this move has also come too late to allow any remedial action in this season.

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Source: Business Standard

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