



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
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Genetically Modified Mustard

Published On: 02-12-2022

Why is in news? Is there a compelling reason for GM mustard; will it not affect environment, asks SC

Mustard is one of India's most important winter crops which is sown **between mid-October and late November**.

The **Indian mustard (Brassica juncea)** is a member of the Brassicaceae family.

Mustard is cultivated by around 6 million farmers in around 6.5-7 million hectares of land across the states of **Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh**.

Currently, India has a **deficit of edible oils** by almost 55-60 per cent of the total consumption. India desperately requires an increase in the productivity of oilseed crops grown in the country. The average mustard yield in India is 1.0-1.3 tonnes/hectare.

Globally, yields of rapeseed have considerably increased with the introduction of hybrids. More than 90% of the rapeseed crop in Canada, grown in around 8.7 million ha, is under hybrids. Most of the rapeseed grown in China and Europe is also hybrids.

In October 2022, the **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)** recommended the environmental release of the genetically-modified (GM) **mustard (Brassica juncea) variety DMH (Dhara Mustard Hybrid)-11** for the development of new generation hybrids, paving the way for the **commercialisation of the country's first GM food crop**.

The decision to release GM mustard will **encourage more research and innovations** to reduce the environmental footprints of agriculture, develop climate resilient crops, and thereby assure food and nutritional security of the country.

It will also accelerate breeding efforts to **produce new high yielding disease and pest resistant hybrids** using this new technology cleared by the Government of India.

Australia has recently on 19 October, **released herbicide tolerant GM Indian mustard** to meet the increasing global demand of edible oil.

The GEAC said that the commercial use of DMH-11 hybrids will be subject to the **Seed Act, 1966**, and related rules and regulations.

According to **South Asia Biotechnology Centre (SABC)**, the GM Mustard is so helpful in honey industry.

In GM mustard, hybrid DMH-11 is fully fertile with pollen viability similar to the parental line Varuna and has fully developed nectaries.

Around **50-60 per cent of the total production of honey in India is mustard honey**, which makes the crop vital for the survival of the honey industry.

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The DMH-11 mustard variety is **herbicide tolerant**, allowing farmers to spray over the crops with weed killer without harming the crops. This has raised fears that farmers may resort to **excessive use of toxic herbicides** which can **lead to weeds becoming resistant to them and the emergence of so-called superweeds**. Critics are also concerned about herbicide residue on GM crops.

Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee:

Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), established under the Ministry of Environment and Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), is the **apex body**, notified under Rules 1989, of the **Environment Protection Act 1986** for approval of activities involving large-scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants in research and industrial production from the environmental safety angle.

The GEAC is also responsible for the **approval of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered organisms and products into the environment** including experimental field trials (Biosafety Research Level trials-I and II also known as BRL I and BRL II).

GMOs	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ GMOs can help us to increase crop yields ▪ Use of genetically modified organisms can reduce the global hunger problem ▪ More people may get out of poverty ▪ GMOs may contain higher amounts of beneficial substances ▪ Can make plants more resistant ▪ GMOs may help to lower food prices ▪ Efficient land use ▪ Easy to cultivate GMOs ▪ Less work is needed in agriculture ▪ Taste of food may be improved through GMOs ▪ We can save water in agricultural processes ▪ Longer shelf-life of genetically modified food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Religious concerns regarding ▪ Humans should not play god ▪ Spread of serious epidemics ▪ We may underestimate the r ▪ Possible safety issues of GMO ▪ GMOs may also alter the DNA ▪ Allergic reactions related to G ▪ GMOs may have the potentia ▪ May make us more vulnerabl ▪ Insufficient objectivity relate ▪ Use of GMOs is not natural ▪ May lead to antibiotic resista ▪ GMO labels are often missing