

# **GEAC's Approval for GM-Mustard**

#### Why in news?

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) has again cleared the proposal for commercial cultivation of genetically modified (GM) mustard.

#### What is the case with GM mustard?

A crop which has a gene artificially inserted into it from another species to give some desired properties (pest resistant, herbicide tolerant, etc.) is known as GM crop.

- The GEAC had earlier <u>cleared the proposal in 2017</u> but the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had vetoed it.
- The Ministry suggested GEAC to hold more studies on the GM crop.
- The Supreme Court also stayed the clearance saying public opinion should be sought on the issue.
- Recently, GEAC recommended the environmental release of **transgenic hybrid mustard DMH-11 (Dhara Mustard Hybrid-11) for seed production** and conduct of field demonstration studies with respect to its effects.
- This is the **first GM food crop** that India has permitted for commercial release.
- After 2006 when the Centre permitted the commercial release of **Bollgard II cotton** (Bt-Cotton), this is the first crop that has overcome regulatory and political hurdles to be allowed for release.
- Though attempts were made to introduce field trials of GM brinjal, it met with stiff resistance.

### What is the need for GM mustard?

Hybridisation involves crossing two genetically dissimilar plant varieties that can even be from the same species. The first-generation (F1) offspring from such crosses tend to have higher yields than the parents.

- **Difficulty in hybridisation** The process of hybridisation is difficult in mustard, as the plants are largely **self-pollinating**.
- The limitation in the scope for developing hybrids in turn affects the production of superior offsprings.
- **Rising edible oil import bill** The country produces only 8.5-9 million tonnes of edible oil annually, while importing 14-14.5 million tonnes during the fiscal year 2022.

#### How is GM mustard produced?

India is the 4th largest contributor of oilseeds in the world and rapeseed and mustard contributes about 28.6% of total oilseeds production.

- GM mustard is developed by the Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants (CGMCP) in Delhi University.
- The scientists have deployed the **barnase-barstar GM technology** to develop DMH-11, containing two alien genes isolated from a soil bacterium called *Bacillus amyloliquefaciens*.
- The barnase gene codes for a protein that impairs pollen production and renders the plant into which it is incorporated male-sterile.
- This plant is then crossed with a fertile parental line containing the barstar gene that blocks the action of the barnase gene.
- The resultant F1 progeny is both high-yielding and also capable of producing seed/ grain.
- DMH-11 was developed by crossing the Indian mustard variety 'Varuna' (barnase line) with an East European 'Early Heera-2' mutant (barstar).

# The science behind DMH-11 🏻

To create Dhara Mustard Hybrid-11, the team improvised on a 1990s breeding innovation pioneered in Belgium called the barnase/barster male sterility technique. It works on the principle of removing male fertility in one parent and restoring it in the offspring



What are the pros and cons of DMH-11?

#### **Pros of DMH-11**

- **Yield** DMH-11 is claimed to have shown an average 28% yield increase over Varuna in contained field trials carried out by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
- **New traits** New traits relating to resistance against disease, etc. can be incorporated.
- **Indigenous** Since the seeds are indigenously developed, the patent remains with government unlike cotton where it is with corporates.
- **Import bill** Mustard oil production from this variety of crop will save a lot on foreign exchange exchequer.
- **Transfer to humans** So far, there is no evidence suggesting that the transgenes could be transferred to humans or animals through consumption of GE food.

### **Cons of DMH-11**

- **Free pricing of technology** -The Centre fixing a cap on the royalty to be paid for the technology discourages companies involved in developing the new technologies from sharing them with Indian firms.
- Effect on honey bees There is a concern over GM mustard threatening or undermining the population of honey bees.
- Use of chemicals It increases the use of toxic herbicides.
- **Corporates** It is a Trojan horse to clear the doorway for powerful companies like Monsanto.
- Entering the wild population Concerns include the capability of the GE Plant to escape and potentially introduce the engineered genes into wild populations.

# What does the GEAC decision mean?

- **GM mustard clearance** By permitting environmental release, the GEAC has allowed the commercial release of GM mustard.
- The Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crops, University of Delhi has to grant permission for the commercial release.
- State governments will have a role in the commercial release of GM variety.
- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) will be the authorised agency to accord necessary permissions for the development of any other mustard hybrids.
- All hybrids released using this technology shall also be regulated under **Seed Act 1966**.
- GEAC nod is not the final approval for commercial release but a step forward.
- The approval is valid for the next 4 years.
- **Other clearances** The GEAC asked Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) to permit to permit field trials of genetically-engineered potato, banana and rubber.

#### References

- 1. The Indian Express Understanding GM mustard
- 2. The Hindu GEAC approves commercial cultivation of GM mustard

- 3. The Hindu Businessline GEAC clears GM mustard
- 4. Business Standard GEAC clears environmental release of GM mustard
- 5. Britannica Mustard

## **Quick facts**

#### **Mustard**

- Family Brassicaceae
- Types
  - $\circ\,$  White or Yellow mustard (Sinapis alba) Mediterranean origin
  - $\circ\,$  Brown or Indian mustard (Brassica juncea) Himalayan origin
- The seeds contain about 30-40% vegetable oil, a slightly smaller proportion of protein, and a strong enzyme called myrosin.
- Rajasthan is the largest producing state in the country.
- Other mustard cultivating states- Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh.

### Genetic engineering appraisal committee (GEAC)

- It is established under Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- It is the apex body for approval of activities involving large scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants.
- It is responsible for approval of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered organisms and products including experimental field trials.

