

## Bt crops like TB for India: Murli Manohar Joshi

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'Bt variety of crops will act as TB (tuberculosis) for the Indian farming industry if continued to be used,' Joshi said at the protest organised under the banner of 'Coalition for a GM-Free India'.

Joshi accused the government of caving in to US pressure and making India an experimentation ground for their companies.

'The committee for deciding the fate of GM crops in the country had no representation from the farming fraternity, unlike Monsanto and Wal-Mart who had a firm footing in the negotiations and will be the biggest gainers if GM variety of crops are allowed in the country,' he added.

Apprehensions regarding the safety of consumption of Bt Brinjal - yet to be allowed for commercial production - was raised and the already produced Bt variety of cotton was severely criticised.

'Bt brinjal, if introduced, will be the first GM vegetable in the world to be allowed for human consumption. It will be impossible for consumers to differentiate between GM brinjal and natural brinjal once the product hits the market,' Bhaskar Goswami from the Forum for Biotechnology and Food Security told IANS.

Thousands of cattle have reportedly died in Andhra Pradesh due to consumption of residues from farms cultivating Bt Cotton.

'Farmers and reapers in Punjab have experienced rashes and skin irritations after harvesting Bt cotton,' Bhaskar added.

GM food crops are produced from genetically modified organisms (GMO) that have had their DNA altered through genetic engineering. This lends various attributes inherent to the organism to the plant. Drought, pest and cold resistance are some of its benefits.

'India already produces brinjal in plenty - we are the second largest producers in the world. The motive behind bringing this product to the market is just for satisfying the profiteering motives of MNCs at the cost of our people,' said Yudhvir Singh, a senior official from the Bhartiya Kisan Union.

A play was also performed to persuade the farmers against growing GM Crops.

- Indo Asian News Service