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SCI-TECH

India bans Monsanto GM cotton seeds

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India has barred Monsanto Company and its Indian partners from selling three varieties of genetically modified cotton in a southern Indian state.

The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee, a federal regulator, refused to renew licences for the sale of three Monsanto BT cotton varieties in Andhra Pradesh state, because they had been found ineffective in controlling pests there, said Suresh Chandra, the committee chairman.

However, the seeds can be sold in other Indian states, Chandra said.

Years of discussion

"It took us six-and-a-half hours of discussion, but at the end, we decided not to renew those licences for Andhra Pradesh," he said.

The Andhra Pradesh state government also asked Monsanto to compensate farmers who it said lost money by sowing its transgenic cotton. Monsanto disputed the claim.

Monsanto's spokeswoman in India, Ranjana Smetacek, said the company had yet to receive the federal regulator's order and would not comment.

The licences granted in March 2002 expired last month, and Monsanto applied for their renewal in six southern and central Indian states,



GM cotton is ineffective against controlling pests, says India

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Suresh Chandra of the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee

including Andhra Pradesh.

Verdict on cotton

In April, the federal regulator asked various state governments to give their comments on the performance of BT cotton over the past three years.

"The report [from Andhra Pradesh state] was not satisfactory, and hence we had to disallow the licences," Chandra said.

St Louis-based Monsanto's BT cotton is the only genetically modified crop allowed in India. BT stands for bacillus thuringiensis, a bacterium whose gene is injected into cotton seeds to give them resistance against boll worms, which are common in India.



India has also been hesitant to use GM technology in foods

Monsanto sold 1.3 million packets of BT cotton in 2004, but critics say the seeds are environmentally hazardous and could contaminate the genes of native varieties through cross pollination.

However, advocates of genetic modification say it helps fight plant diseases, increases yields, and makes food crops more nutritious.

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