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# Indian *Bt* cotton discounted

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A producer of genetically modified (GM) cotton from Pune, India, teamed up with a state-run farmers' cooperative to sell its insect-resistant seeds at a much-reduced price. Krishidhan Seeds will market its own cotton varieties developed by incorporating Monsanto's *Bacillus thuringiensis* (*Bt*) gene into its own hybrids through the Maharashtra State Cotton Growers Marketing Federation, located in Nagpur. The strategic move ensures farmers benefit from the subsidies available to private-public entities. The Maharashtra state accounts for nearly a third of all GM cotton grown in India, and its uptake has been growing since 2002. Critics like Kishore Tiwari of the advocacy group Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti in Yavatmal consider the state's support for GM varieties ironic, as this cotton-growing region witnessed the most farmers' suicides since 2005. But an independent investigation conducted in 2009 concluded that suicide among farmers had several causes and *Bt* cotton was not a major factor ([Nat. Biotechnol.](#) **27**, 9–10, 2009). A recent study tracking 533 smallholder cotton growers in India from 2002–2008 found that those adopting *Bt* cotton had 24% higher yields and a 50% gain in profits compared with farmers growing traditional varieties (<http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1203647109>).

<http://news.sciencemag.org/scienceinsider/2012/08/india-should-be-more-wary-of-gm-.html?ref=em>

# India Should Be More Wary of GM Crops, Parliamentary Panel Says

by Pallava Bagla on 9 August 2012, 6:07 PM | [3 Comments](#)

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**NEW DEHLI**—A high-profile Indian parliamentary panel on agriculture has urged a retreat from genetically modified (GM) food crops and is seeking the mandatory labelling of all GM foods. The report from a 31-member standing panel of parliament, delivered today, concludes that GM “field trials under any garb should be discontinued forthwith” and that future research and development should “only be done under strict containment.”

The panel undertook their review, the authors say, because of “serious differences of opinion amongst stakeholders and the controversies surrounding transgenic food crops.” The furor intensified after a government review gave its blessing to genetically modified brinjal (a type of eggplant).

The panel’s deliberations, designed to include many interested parties, gathered 15,000 pages of testimony and 50 oral depositions. The 2-year effort produced a 492-page analysis, “Cultivation of Genetically Modified Food Crops—Prospects and Effects.”

The panel chair, Basudeb Acharia, a member of parliament representing the Communist Party of India (Marxist), said in a statement that “India should not go in for GM food crops.” He also suggested that “there is a connection” between Bt cotton, a GM product that includes genes from *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) to make it pest-resistant, and farmers’ suicides, referring to thousands of farmers who have committed suicide in the last few years due to indebtedness, mostly in cotton growing regions.

The panel report deplores the fact that 93% of the cotton crop in India is now Bt cotton, which rapidly replaced traditional cotton in most areas. The panel argues that farmers now have “no alternative” but to buy more expensive Bt cotton seed. The panel concludes that “the experience of last decade has conclusively shown that while [transgenic agriculture] has extensively benefited the industry, as far as the lot of poor farmers is concerned, even trickle down is not visible.”

No company or industry group has responded at this time.

The GM review panel also sought to investigate a government regulatory panel’s 2009 decision to permit an Indian company to release Bt brinjal. This action “was indicative of collusion of a worst kind,” the report charges. The report quotes a former official saying that he felt he was pressured by industry and other officials to approve the release of Bt brinjal. Former environment minister Jairam Ramesh held a countrywide series of public hearings and in February 2010 imposed an indefinite moratorium on the release of Bt brinjal.

The report will now be examined by the relevant ministries, which will consider whether and how to implement the recommendations. These agencies will submit responses back to the panel on actions they have taken.