

Experts call for balanced technology policies to maximise benefits from GM crops

KOCHI, OCT 11 : Agricultural experts on Wednesday emphasised that formulating balanced technology policies are crucial for maximising benefits from GM crops. This came at a discussion on genome editing, biosafety for product development and socioeconomic considerations at the on-going 16th Agricultural Science Congress (ASC) currently being held here. They were of the view that the sector needs broader and multi-dimensional framework to understand the net social value of technology transpired in the field and suggested that there should be greater consultations among agri-bio scientists and social scientists.

R. Ramkumar from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and the part-time Member of Kerala State Planning Board said that government-run research establishments in the country should take adequate care and measures for risk assessment, risk management, hazard identification and socio-cultural impact of agricultural technologies. "Understanding socioeconomics and sustainability implications are very much required for up scaling upcoming technologies on genomics in the agriculture sector," he said.

On the Bt cotton experience in India, he said that this technology was not a failure as widely perceived but this experience can be utilised to bridge the disconnect between technology regime and policy discourse. Hence, social impacts like displacement and inequality can be addressed adequately.

Michael Jones from Murdoch University, Australia pointed out that the applications of the best science and technology, including in the areas of agri-bio, agri-tech and food-tech are required to produce more food from less land to meet the growing food demand sustainably. "The genetic potential of crop plants in the field underlies all these technologies, and genome or gene editing is providing exciting new opportunities for genetic crop improvement," he said.