

WORLD'S FIRST GM RUBBER SAPLING PLANTED IN ASSAM

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Rubber Board Chairman K.N. Raghavan planting the GM rubber sapling in Guwahati on Tuesday. Special Arrangement

A Rubber Board research farm on the outskirts of Guwahati now sports the world's first genetically modified (GM) rubber plant tailored for the climatic conditions in the Northeast.

The GM rubber has additional copies of the gene MnSOD, or manganese-containing superoxide dismutase, inserted in the plant, which is expected to tide over the severe cold conditions during winter — a major factor affecting the growth of young rubber plants in the region.

The plant was developed at the Kerala-based Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII).

Planting the GM rubber at the research farm at Sarutari off the highway to Meghalaya capital Shillong on June 22, Rubber Board Chairman and Executive Director K.N. Raghavan said the RRII had earlier developed two high-yielding hybrid clones of rubber adapted to the climatic conditions of the Northeast.

"This is the first time any GM crop has been developed exclusively for this region after years of painstaking research in RRII's biotechnology laboratory," he said. Natural rubber is a native of warm humid Amazon forests and is not naturally suited for the colder conditions in the Northeast, which is one of the largest producers of rubber in India. Laboratory studies conducted at the RRII showed the GM rubber plants overexpressed the MnSOD gene as expected.

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