

GM mustard in for a long wait

Many activist groups are against GM Mustard.

Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan has indicated that a decision on releasing genetically modified (GM) mustard commercially was unlikely any time soon.

“There are compelling arguments from those who support it and those against it,” he said responding to a query from *The Hindu*. “The government however will only take a decision based on common good.”

Dr. Harsh Vardhan, who holds the Science portfolio, took over the Environment Ministry after the death of Anil Dave. That makes him the final government arbiter on allowing GM mustard to be made available commercially. GM mustard was developed by scientists at Delhi University and the project was part-funded by the Department of Biotechnology, a division of the Science Ministry.

‘No conflict’

Dr. Harsh Vardhan said there was “no conflict” in his position as a Science and Environment Minister.

In June, he said he would have a fresh consultation with environmental groups, scientists and farmers’ bodies before taking a call on the release of GM mustard. Multiple officials have since confirmed to *The Hindu* that this has not happened.

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), India’s regulator for genetically modified seeds, had on May 12 this year cleared GM mustard for environmental release and use in fields. Though it was cleared by scientists, the Environment Minister’s approval is required.

The Centre told the Supreme Court last week that it was considering various aspects and was still to take a final call on the commercial release of GM mustard. “We are looking into all reports by experts including that of the Rajya Sabha sub-committee before a final decision is taken,” said Additional Solicitor-General P.S. Narasimha, representing the Centre.

A Parliamentary Standing Committee, headed by Renuka Chowdhary of the Congress, last month said that there was a paucity of studies on the impact of GM crops on human health. Should the Minister’s consent be obtained, GM mustard would be the first transgenic food crop to be allowed for commercial cultivation in India. It could pave the way for several other GM food crops in the country. Dhara Mustard Hybrid (DMH -11), the transgenic mustard in question, has been developed by a team of scientists at Delhi University under a government-funded project.

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