

State level Biosafety capacity building workshop held at AAU, Anand

A State level biosafety capacity building workshop Under the UNEP/GEF Supported Phase II Capacity Building Project on Biosafety was jointly organized by Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Government of India, New Delhi; Biotech Consortium India Limited, New Delhi; Anand Agricultural University, Anand & Department of Agriculture, Government of Gujarat on 13 July, 2017 at AAU, Anand. The deliberations of the workshop were held at Yagyavalkya Hall of the University Bhawan.

Nearly 120 participants attended the workshop which included scientists and teachers from Anand Agricultural University; other State Agricultural Universities of Gujarat; faculty from MSU, Baroda; SPU, V. V. Nagar; National institutes like CSMCRI Bhavnagar; DMAPR, Boriavi; officials of State Department of Agriculture Gujarat; seed company representatives and farmers. The Expert speakers from the different premier institutes of country including Dr. B. Sesikeran Chairman, RCGM; Dr. Vibha Ahuja Chief General Manager, BCIL; Dr. Celia Chalam, Principal Scientist, NBPGR, New Delhi delivered the lectures during the workshop. The other distinguished speakers from Gujarat included Dr. R.S. Fougat, Professor & Head, Department of Agricultural Biotechnology, AAU, Anand; Dr. Chandermohan Singh, DGR-ICAR, Junagadh; Dr. Rajesh Patkar, MSU, Baroda; Dr. Pradeep. K. Agarwal, CSMCRI, Bhavnagar and Dr. R.S. Tomar, JAU, Junagadh.

The Inaugural Session was chaired by Dr. N. C. Patel, Vice Chancellor, AAU, Anand. At the outset, Dr. R.S. Fougat, Professor and Head & Nodal Officer of the workshop greeted all the participants and invited Dr. K.B. Kathiria, Director of Research & Dean P.G. Studies, AAU, Anand for welcome address. Dr. K.B. Kathiria welcomed all the dignitaries and emphasized that GMOs are very much needed to break the yield plateau in many of the crops, so as to meet the ever increasing demand of food across the globe. Dr. Vibha Ahuja, Chief General Manager, BCIL introduced the objectives of the workshop and explained in brief, the biosafety regulations in India. Dr. Qureshi, Joint Director (Agriculture) stressed up on the need to create awareness among farmers who are actual end users of the technology. Dr. B. Sesikeran, Chairman, RCGM in his key note address, advocated the role of State Governments in GM regulation and informed the house that biosafety norms in India are most stringent and GM varieties are thoroughly tested for safety assessment during their developmental stages. He also discussed at length the reasons for poor acceptability of GM crops in India. Dr. N.C. Patel, Vice Chancellor, AAU, Anand, in

his opening remarks stated that 60-70% of country's population depend on agriculture thus we should have a comprehensive agricultural policy, including on GM crops. He also briefed about the biotechnological research being carried out in Anand Agricultural University, Anand.

In two technical sessions, all the speakers emphasized that the modern biotechnological tools, especially genetic modification (GM) has the potential for resolving several agricultural constraints ranging from inherently low crop yields to stress-related issues arising from pests, diseases and drought to mention a few. However, as the transgenic varieties are developed through a series of techniques wherein genetic material is altered in a way that does not occur naturally by mating or natural recombination, concerns are persistently expressed about the safety, ethical and trade-related aspects of genetically modified organisms by consumers and the environmentalists; necessitating the need for regulation of GM products and their submission to rigorous food and feed safety testing procedures. Accordingly, adoption of appropriate bio-safety measures, including development and implementation of bio-safety regulations, has been a high priority of countries using biotechnology for agricultural research and development. The Indian government through the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change and department of Biotechnology and their various regulatory agencies like RCGM and GEAC works to ensure that, new agricultural biotechnology products are safe for animal and human health and safe for the environment. However, still various stakeholders of biotechnology including scientists, seed producers, and public in general and farmers in particular are unaware of this regulatory framework and their procedures.

Therefore, the present workshop was organized by MoEF&CC in association with Biotech Consortium India Limited, New Delhi, Anand Agricultural University, Anand and Govt. of Gujarat. The objectives of the workshop were to create awareness among field staff conducting GM field trials on bio-safety aspects and to discuss safety and regulatory aspects associated with bio-safety and provide guidelines on, as to how contained and confined field trials on GM crops should be conducted. All the experts further informed the delegates that, biosafety regulatory framework in India is very strong and safe which ensures very rigorous process for monitoring and approval of GMO's in the country and GM crop varieties are as safe as their non-GM counterparts.

The workshop ended with vote of thanks from Dr. R.S. Fougat, Professor and Head & Nodal Officer of the workshop.



