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National biotech policy being formulated

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ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of National Food Security has started process to formulate a 'national biotechnology policy', and was working on preparation of various guidelines and regulatory measures to enhance agricultural productivity and protection.

Speaking at a workshop on bio-technology and bio-safety for food and feed security in Pakistan here on Friday, the Minister for National Food Security and Research, Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan, said that use of agricultural biotechnology has the potential to enhance country's food production by at least six per cent.

He regretted that despite initial recognition and quick response, use of agricultural biotechnology was not recognised as one of the key drivers of agricultural growth in Pakistan, unlike other countries.

The minister emphasised the need to upgrade and enhance capacity of national biotech research institutes, and at the same time agricultural research should be focused on developing second generation transgenic crops with improved resistance to pests, diseases and environmental stresses.

Biotechnology centres were already functioning in provincial and federal capitals.

He, however, said biotechnology did not establish roots as an emerging source of socio-economic development in the country.

He said research on insect resistant transgenic cotton varieties started in 1995 was able to develop some transgenic lines but it took almost 15 years to launch legal commercial cultivation of these varieties in 2010.

He said Pakistan is also lagging behind other countries in development of second generation transgenic crops with improved tolerance to environmental stresses and crops for bio-energy production.

The dependency on fossil fuels as energy sources is on the decline because of enormous potential of bio-feed stock, like crops, trees and grasses, to produce bio-energy products, such as ethanol, bio-diesel and petroleum on industrial scale, he said.

The FAO has called upon the government for a comprehensive approach for a national agricultural biotechnology programme.