

## Open field trials of GM crops: SC seeks Centre's response

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**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought an answer from the Centre as to why there should not be an interim suspension of open field trials of Genetically Modified crops in view of an expert committee disfavoured it.



AFP

"We have reports of responsible persons who occupy responsible positions. Don't you think there should be an interim order (against open field trials) till we hear this case?" a bench headed by Justice HL Dattu observed.

However, the bench, also comprising justice SA Bobde clarified that it was not inclined to halt trial in closed environment or isolated conditions.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for anti-GM activists, submitted that open field trials should be banned till a strong regulatory regime was in place.

He cited the 2012 report of the court-appointed expert committee recommending the ban and the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee to buttress that experts were of the opinion that a moratorium should be

imposed on open field trials till regulatory regime was put in place.

However, Additional Solicitor General Paras Kuhat countered the arguments of anti-GM activists by saying all recommendations of the expert committees were "virtually" in place and the community of Indian and international scientists was in favour of allowing GM crops' field trials.

"We will set the clock at least 10 years back (if field trials are banned). Scientist won't conduct studies in adverse regimes," he said.

The bench will continue with the hearing on Wednesday.

Earlier in July 2013, the activist had asked the Supreme Court to accept the final report of its technical expert committee while "ignoring" any findings by its member and former DG of Indian Council of Agriculture Research RS Paroda, alleging that he had "conflict of interest" on the issue.

The affidavit filed by activist Aruna Rodrigues, who had sought a complete moratorium on field trial of GMO, had said the final report and documents by the expert committee (TEC) recommended no field trials till regulatory gaps are addressed as there have been serious shortcomings in the GMO regulatory process.

The affidavit claimed that there is evidence of both institutional and personal conflict of interest that enmesh Paroda.

The apex court in November 2012 had refused to impose an interim ban on their field trials despite the court-appointed expert committee recommending the ban.

The government had pleaded that recommendation of the apex court-appointed Technical Expert Committee (TEC) for banning field trials of the GM crops be rejected as the use of biotechnology in agriculture can bring second green revolution in the country.

The anti-GM activists, however, pleaded with the apex court to ban field trials as per the TEC's recommendation as it can cause irreversible damage to the environment.

**PTI**