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National and International Experts Declare:

Parliamentary Panel Report on GM Crops not Objective

We refer to the recently launched report “Cultivation of genetically modified food crops – prospects and effects” prepared by India’s Committee on Agriculture. Much of what is written in this report refers to *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) cotton, which is the only genetically modified (GM) crop technology commercially approved in India up till now. One conclusion in this report is that Bt cotton has benefited seed companies but not poor farmers. The report further states that Bt cotton has contributed to farmer suicides. This information is simply wrong. It contradicts the scientific evidence on the benefits of Bt cotton in India, published in studies by national and international scholars.

As independent agricultural economists and political scientists with substantial research experience in the field of GM crop impacts we are well aware of the contentious public debate in India and elsewhere. For many years, anti-GM groups have tried to challenge the available evidence on Bt cotton benefits for smallholder farmers in India. But these claims by anti-GM groups are unsubstantiated. We are therefore very surprised that these claims are now reproduced in a high-level parliamentary panel report, while the large number of peer-reviewed scientific studies is completely ignored.

The scientific literature shows that Bt cotton adoption has significantly reduced chemical pesticide use in India, while increasing farmers’ yields and profits. Studies also show that farm household incomes and living standards have increased as a result of Bt cotton adoption. A substantial share of these benefits accrues to poor farm families. There is no correlation between farmer suicides and Bt cotton adoption. Nor is there any indication that Bt would harm biodiversity or the environment. On the contrary, the reduction in chemical pesticide use has brought about sizeable positive health and environmental effects.

We acknowledge that cotton farmers in many parts of India suffer from erratic rainfalls and other conditions that can contribute to crop failures and social hardship. We also acknowledge that Bt technology is not a silver bullet to all these problems. But Bt is a solution to some serious pest problems, and farmers are clearly better off with this technology than without it. The scientific evidence for this conclusion is so strong that it cannot simply be ignored. The benefits for poor farmers and consumers will further increase when GM food crops are developed and commercialized.

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