

Press Release : Bangalore : 21 January 2010

Jairam Ramesh rebuts Sharad Pawar's stand Centre has no role in reviewing GEAC decision on Bt Brinjal

Reasserts right to hold Public Consultations on Bt Brinjal issue

This morning a small report appeared in the Deccan Herald with the title:

"Panel to take decision on Bt brinjal

New Delhi, Jan 20,

PTI: <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/47973/panel-take-decision-bt-brinjal.html>

Union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar said here on Wednesday that the expert committee's decision on the introduction of Bt brinjal will be final and the Centre does not have any say in the issue.

"We don't have any opinion on it. The decisions of the committee on the issue is final. The Ministry does not have any say on the issue," the Union Agriculture minister told reporters on the sidelines of the state ministers' conference on milk productivity. " (ENDS)

Environment Support Group brought this report to the attention of Mr. Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests (i/c). In an immediate response, Mr. Ramesh has shot of a letter to Mr. Sharad Pawar, Union Minister for Agriculture. A copy of this letter was shared with Environment Support Group and is attached to this release.

In this letter Mr. Ramesh asserts the pre-eminent position of the Union Government in protecting wider public interest while deciding on complex, controversial and far reaching decisions relating to the release of the first GMO food in India – Bt Brinjal. Mr. Ramesh states: "GEAC may well be a statutory body but when critical issues of human safety are involved, the Government has every right and, in fact has a basic responsibility, to take the final decision based on the recommendations of the GEAC". Providing the rationale for why he decided to hold Public Consultations across India before taking a final decision on the GEAC's approval to Bt Brinjal on 14 October 2009, Mr. Ramesh argues "(s)ince Bt-Brinjal will be the first genetically modified food crop and since I am well aware of the concerns that have been raised on this issue, I decided that I will have public consultations in seven cities – Kolkata, Bhubaneswar, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Nagpur and Chandigarh. I have also written to Chief Ministers of six important brinjal cultivating states – West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. In addition, I have sought feedback from over 50 top scientists both from India and abroad."

In an emphatic defense of the ongoing public consultation processes, Mr. Ramesh writes to Mr. Pawar that "...you will agree that in a democracy like ours, we have to take decisions that have far-reaching consequences with the greatest degree of caution, with the greatest degree of transparency and after ensuring that all stakeholders have been heard to their satisfaction. This is what I have sought to ensure ever since the GEAC recommendations reached me." Further adding, "I have no personal agenda whatsoever in this matter except to listen, to study and then take a decision", which Mr. Ramesh says will include "..... sharing my final view with PM as well as with you and the Health Minister".

For an up to date online collation of news articles relating to the release of GMO food in India, please review: <http://newsrack.in/stories/indiatogether/Agriculture/2>. More information on the implications of releasing GMO in India based on the GEAC's October approval is available at: www.esgindia.org



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