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GM food labeling: Science, sense and stewardship of it

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Labeling of genetically modified (GM) foods is a contentious issue across the world. GM food is produced in 28 countries and imported by several other countries. Production and consumption of GM foods is increasing every year since 1996, when these were first commercialized. At the same time, the perceived notions about safety of GM foods among consumers have led to different kinds of voluntary, executive or legislative guidelines for labeling of GM foods in different countries. The labeling requirements have increased the complexities for the food industry and international food trade, necessitating greater understanding of the science, sense and stewardship of GM food labeling among the stakeholders in the food businesses. The United States which remains the leading country in production and consumption of GM foods does not differentiate between foods created by conventional or GM means unless the later are altered for nutritional value. On the other hand, the European Union requires mandatory labeling for products with greater than 0.9% GM ingredients. In India, from January 2013, the central government has made it mandatory to label all packaged GM foods under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009. However, the threshold for GM ingredients has not been defined. So far, India has allowed use of only two food products derived from GM material i.e., imported GM soybean oil (crude de-gummed/refined form) derived from Roundup Ready Soybean for the purpose of consumption after refining and domestically produced cottonseed oil. However, the issue of labeling of these oils or food products made in these oils has not arisen because oil derived from GM soybean or GM cotton is free from any detectable GM ingredient. Scientific aspects of latest molecular techniques for GM detection across food supply chain shall be discussed.

Biography

Pranjal Yadava has earned his BSc in Agriculture from Pantnagar University, MSc in Biotechnology from Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and PhD in Plant Genetic Engineering from International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, New Delhi. He has extensively worked in private and government sector on agricultural biotechnology and GM foods. As a member of Central Compliance Committee for monitoring GM maize field trials in India, he has close understanding on issues of GM food commercialization. He is also a Member of the Institutional Biosafety Committee. He has firsthand experience of development GM tomato and GM maize. He has widely travelled in India and abroad and constantly speaks and writes about the potential of GM crops and other scientific innovations in the agriculture sector.

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