

Minutes of the 8th Meeting of the Standing Committee to review applications for commercial release of Bt cotton hybrids expressing approved events under ‘Event based approval mechanism (EBAM)’ held in DBT, New Delhi on 14th February, 2012

The 8th meeting of the Standing Committee to review applications for commercial release of Bt cotton hybrids expressing approved events under ‘Event based approval mechanism (EBAM)’ was held on 14th February, 2012 in Department of Biotechnology, New Delhi under the Chairmanship of Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan, ADG (Commercial Crops), ICAR, New Delhi. The list of participants is as follows:

A. Members

Dr. Dilip Monga, Head CICR Regional Station, Sirsa, Haryana
Dr. K.K.Tripathi, Member Secretary, RCGM & Scientist-G, DBT
Dr. Shruti Rai Bhardwaj, Deputy Director, M/o Environment & Forests, New Delhi
Mrs. Rajalakshmi Muralidharan, Member Secretary, Standing Committee & Scientist D, DBT

B. Special Invitees

Dr. Nitin Kumar Jain, Scientist D, DBT
Dr. Amit Parikh, Scientist C, DBT

Welcome Remarks by the Chairman

Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan, Chairman, Standing Committee extended a formal welcome to all members of Standing Committee for the 8th meeting and initiated the process of the meeting.

Leave of Absence

The Committee noted that Dr. Punit Mohan had informed that he would not be available due to some prior engagements. Leave of absence was granted to Dr. Punit Mohan.

Action taken report by the Member- Secretary

Member Secretary informed in brief about the action taken on the minutes of the previous meeting of the Standing Committee held on 06.05.2011. It was also informed that necessary follow up action was taken on the recommendations of the Standing Committee in its 7th meeting and letters were issued to State Agriculture Departments/applicants.

Remarks/Views by the Members

The Chairman appreciated the efforts of the seed companies to develop new Bt cotton hybrids with better performance in terms of disease tolerance and yield. He also observed that majority of the applicants have now submitted the details of performance of the proposed hybrids through SAU/ICAR trial reports which will facilitate the Committee in evaluating the applications and to recommend quality hybrids giving good yield to farmers. Since a large of number of Bt cotton hybrids have already been released under EBAM, the Committee requested GEAC to develop a mechanism through the Sub-Committee constituted recently to filter out non-performing hybrids and to make sure that the farmers get best performing hybrids for cultivation.

The Committee considered the communication received from Member Secretary, GEAC in response to the recommendations of the Standing Committee in its 6th and 7th meetings to revise the Terms of Reference (TOR) by incorporating the submission of SAU/ICAR trial reports for all Zones, and data on CLCuV disease tolerance for North Zone, and morphological characteristics based on DUS descriptors as per PPV&FRA guidelines. The Committee noted that GEAC has

constituted a Sub Committee under the Chairmanship of DDG, ICAR to review measures to streamline the regulatory process and the report of the Sub Committee is still awaited and therefore decision of GEAC on the Standing Committee's recommendations have been deferred. The Committee reiterated its recommendations and requested GEAC to include the same in the TOR of the Standing Committee for scrutinizing the applications for commercial release of Bt cotton hybrids under EBAM. The Committee opined that the performance trial report including pest and disease reaction for the proposed Bt cotton hybrids for both rainfed and irrigated situations as evidenced by at least one SAU supported trial from respective SAUs are essential from each State of a particular Zone.

Recommendations of the Bt cotton hybrids to referral laboratories

The Standing Committee scrutinized the applications for North, Central and South Zones taking into consideration the TOR of the Committee stipulated by GEAC and also the additional parameters mentioned in the Call for Applications published on the DBT Biosafety Website. The Committee considered the following parameters for evaluating and recommending the commercial release of the Bt. Cotton hybrids expressing four approved events under EBAM while making recommendations for the consideration of the different State Agriculture Departments under intimation to the GEAC:

1. Confirmation of gene/ event through molecular characterization by the licensor that the gene/s which is being used is one of the approved events (LOC in original)
2. Level of protein expression in green house and field trials
3. Morphological characters using DUS descriptors as per PPVF&RA guidelines for the hybrids as well as parental lines
4. Bio-efficacy data generated in laboratory conditions
5. Authorization certificate/ No Objection Certificate (NOC) in original from technology provider in case of sub-licensee
6. Affidavits duly signed by the Notary on Stamp Paper
7. Field trial data of the particular hybrid at least for one year from the concerned SAU
9. Data on tolerance of Bt cotton hybrids to CLCuV in North Zone (only for hybrids to be released in North Zone) as evaluated by SAU Centre in North Zone/CICR, Sirsa

The Committee observed that some applicants have given only one SAU report for each Zone. The Committee also noted that SAU report from Rajasthan has indicated bollworm complex damage in Bt cotton hybrids tested there. The Committee deliberated on the matter and decided that the test hybrids which showed bollworm complex damage should not be recommended for commercial release in Rajasthan. The Committee therefore unanimously decided that based on the performance of hybrid reported in the SAU/ICAR trial report, the proposed Bt cotton hybrid should be recommended for the respective State Agriculture Department only, and not for the entire zone, for commercial release under EBAM.

Based on the SAU/ICAR trial report, the Committee categorized the applications for commercial release of Bt cotton hybrids in respective States of North, Central and South Zones under two Sets as under:

- Set 1- Recommended cases: SAU/ICAR data is available, yield of the hybrid is at par or better than the check, and it is CLCuV disease tolerant (only in case of North Zone States)
- Set 2- Deferred till the decision of GEAC is received: SAU/ICAR data is available or non-available, yield of the hybrid is lower than the check, susceptible to CLCuV disease, and hybrid showed bollworm complex damage

Based on the SAU/ICAR reports, the Committee recommended the Bt cotton hybrids for commercial release in respective States in North, Central and South Zones as per Annexure-II, III and IV. In view of specific letter from the Karnataka State Department of Agriculture in respect of R&D trials and BRL trials regarding Bt crop/transgenic crops in Karnataka State, issued dated 21st January, 2012, specific clarification needs to be sought from GEAC regarding recommending Bt cotton hybrids through EBAM Committee as regards Karnataka, as it involves larger perspective of seed production, biodiversity act provisions etc.

The decision on the applications which come under Set-2 was deferred till the decision of GEAC on the revision of TOR is received. The Committee requested GEAC to expedite the decision.

The Committee directed the Member Secretary to issue recommendation letters on the same lines as recommended in the 7th Standing Committee meeting, to different State Agriculture Departments in North, Central and South Zones, State-wise, for recommended Bt cotton hybrids under intimation to GEAC. The Member Secretary was also directed to communicate the recommendations of the Standing Committee on applications categorized under Set-2, to the applicants, only after obtaining the final decision from GEAC.

Other items with the permission of the Chair:

- 1) Communication received from Member Secretary, GEAC on the request received from M/s. Super Seeds Pvt. Ltd., Hisar for permission for use of pigeon pea as refugia crop in place of non Bt cotton seed in North, Central and South Zones

The Committee noted that GEAC considered the request in its meeting held on 13.5.2007 and approved pigeon pea as an alternate host in place of non-Bt cotton refugia while growing Bt cotton. The Committee deliberated on the issue and observed that it is not a common practice to grow pigeonpea along with cotton in North zone and the flowering time of Bt cotton hybrid and pigeon pea may also be different and therefore pigeon pea may not be suitable as refugia in place of non Bt cotton seed in North zone. The Committee desired to refer the matter to CICR, Nagpur and SAUs of North Zone to comment on the feasibility of using pigeon pea as refugia in place of non-Bt cotton hybrid. The decision was therefore deferred.

- 2) Communication received from Member Secretary, GEAC on the request received from M/s. Monsanto Holdings Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi for inclusion of Brahma BGII and Sudarshan BGII (Event Mon 15985) in South Rajasthan of Central Zone

The Committee advised the applicant to submit fresh application for release of Bt cotton hybrids in South Rajasthan.

With the above, the meeting ended with thanks to the Chair. The minutes approved with incorporation of suggestions and modifications.

Sd/-

(Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan)
Chairman, Standing Committee &
ADG (Commercial Crops), ICAR, New Delhi

Place: New Delhi
Date: 21.02.2012