

DELHI

THE HINDU THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2010

Improved Agronomic Practices Drive India's Bt Cotton Revolution

In seven years India has become the second largest producer and exporter

M.J.PRABU

A midst the challenges in agriculture, India's Bt cotton success story stands out even in the controversy over Bt and GM crops.

Take the case of Mr.Gurtej Singh, from Ghragna, Punjab. The farmer constructed a new home costing Rs.20 lakh, purchase4d one acre (he already owns 16 acres), invested in an education policy for his son and bought a new car.

Another cotton farmer Mr.Nandkishore Raut, from Bhambraja village, Yavatmal, Maharashtra, purchased 2 acres land (already owns 6 acres), built a new pucca home, and took a life insurance policy worth Rs.1.75 lakh for his son.

Similarly Mr.Botla Kumara Swamy, Sivaji Nagar Village, Warangal, Andhra Pradesh, cultivates Bt cotton in four acres.

He constructed a home costing Rs. 1.5 lakh, bought a second-hand motorcycle for Rs.20, 000, and installed a pipeline for irrigation. In addition he started a small milk collection-cum-analysis business and earns approximately Rs.15, 000 a month.

Higher living standards

“Families of bt cotton seed farmers in India enjoy a higher standard for living such as purchasing cars, motorcycles, building pucca and larger houses, enrolling their children in English medium schools, or sending them abroad for education, investing in agricultural land, and farm equipment such as tractors and drip irrigation,” says Mr.Jagresh Rana, Director- Mahyco Monsanto Biotech, Mumbai.

“As farmers upgrade to newer technologies, it is becoming evident that they are experiencing immense value from insect- protected Bt cotton which also provides higher yields, ease of farming convenience, in addition to better insect resistance management,” says Mr.Jagresh.

Within seven years of its introduction of Bt cotton (2002-08), it made India the world's second largest producer and exporter of cotton (ahead of U.S and China).

Facts based on study

“According to a study by University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, frequent health concerns such as giddiness, nausea, itching etc. experienced by farmers/farm workers due to higher number of pesticides applications in non-Bt cotton fields are reduced considerably in cultivating Bt cotton,” claims Mr.Jagresh.

Research by Indian Market Research Bureau (IMRB) in 2007 on the benefits of Bt cotton concluded that Bt cotton farmers earn on an average, 64 percent higher income (Rs. 8,669) per acre than conventional seed farmers.

Yield details

On an average, Bt cotton seeds provided cotton farmers with yields of 700-900 kg. per acre vs. 300-400 kg. per acre with conventional seeds.

“Indian farmers are astute determinants of value. Farmers determine value based on quality of yield, fair price, and convenience.

“Give a farmer higher good quality cotton yields, better returns (fair market price), and more convenience when farming- and he is likely to adopt a new product, “says Mr. Jagresh.

“Within eight years of introduction, India's cotton farmers have adopted bt cotton seeds on approx. 90 percent or over 192 lakh of India's total 225 lakh cotton acres.

“While in the first five years of 2002-06, farmers adopted the first-generations single-gene insect- protected bt cotton seeds on 39 per cent of India's total cotton acres (87 lakh acres in 2006 vs. 72,000 acres in 2002); since then, to the second-generation double-gene insect-protected Bollgard II bt cotton seeds over the next four years of 2006-2009 at a much faster pace, “he explains.

Major Market

India is the world's most competitive cotton seed market. The introduction of bt cotton technology re-cata-lyzed cotton seed research in India and farmers now choose from 350+ insect- protected Bt cotton hybrid seed varieties offered by 30 plus Indian seed companies with six bt cotton technologies.

New technologies

“Rapid increase in the number of farmers and acreages cultivation Bt cotton seeds in testament to Indian farmer’s faith and trust in this technology, and their willingness to embrace new technologies, “ adds Mr. Jagresh.

Whatever the controversy over Bt brinjal, Bt cotton remains a majour success story in India.

For more information readers can contact the farmers Mr.Gurtej Singh, Ghragna, Punjab, Mob:- 9872104955, Mr.Nandkishore Raut, Yuvatmal, Maharashtra, Mob: 9881378484, Mr.Botla Kumar Swamy, Shivaji Nagar Village, Warangal, Andhra Pradesh, Mob:-9642260356.