

# **“NO to GMO”: 2019 Indian General Election: Manifesto Demand for Indefinite Moratorium on GMOs**

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*A new ‘Political Manifesto’ has demanded an indefinite moratorium on the environmental release of GMOs in India pending independent and rigorous biosafety risk assessment and regulation.*

The documents states:

“GMO contamination of our seeds, our foundation seed stock, will change the structure of our food at the molecular level. Any harm or toxicity that there is will remain, without the possibility of remediation or reversibility.”

Signed by high-profile organisations and individuals, including farmer’s organisation Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU), the Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture, Aruna Rodrigues (Lead Petitioner: Supreme Court GMO PIL), Kavitha Kuruganti and Vandana Shiva as well as dozens of co-signatories, the manifesto demands the introduction of a biosafety protection act, which would prioritise India’s biosafety and biodiversity and implement the GMO moratorium, while preventing the import of any GMOs into India.

The manifesto also calls for a ban on the herbicides glyphosate and glufosinate as well as for national consultations and a parliamentary debate to formulate policy to establish and incentivize agroecological systems of farming as a means of avoiding ecosystems collapse. In addition, the document wants a pledge that farmers’ traditional knowledge and inherent seed freedom will remain secure and that there should be no patents on GMO seeds or plants.

The release of the manifesto coincides with the upcoming 2019 Indian general election, which begins in April.

The current Modi-led administration has presided over an accelerating push within official circles for GM agriculture. There has also been creeping illegal contamination of the nation’s food supply with GMOs. This might seem perplexing given that the ruling BJP [stated](#) in its last election manifesto: “GM foods will not be allowed without full scientific evaluation on the long-term effects on soil, production and biological impact on consumers.”

Readers are urged to read the five-page [‘Political Manifesto Demand With Regard to GMOs/LMOs’](#). It sets out clear and cogent arguments for the moratorium and contains the list of signatories.

## Five high-level reports: no to GMOs

In India, five high-level reports have advised against the adoption of GM crops: the 'Jairam Ramesh Report' imposing an indefinite moratorium on Bt Brinjal (2010); the 'Sopory Committee Report' (2012); the 'Parliamentary Standing Committee' (PSC) Report on GM crops (2012); the 'Technical Expert Committee (TEC) Final Report' (2013); and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science & Technology, Environment and Forests (2017).

These reports conclude that GM crops are unsuitable for India and that existing proper biosafety and regulatory procedures are inadequate. Appointed by the Supreme Court, the TEC was scathing about the prevailing regulatory system and highlighted its inadequacies and serious inherent conflicts of interest. The TEC recommended a 10-year moratorium on the commercial release of GM crops. The PSC also arrived at similar conclusions.

However, the drive to get GM mustard commercialised (which would be India's first officially-approved GM food crop) has been relentless. The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) has even pushed the process by giving it the nod, but the cultivation of GM mustard remains on hold in the Supreme Court due to a public interest litigation brought by lead petitioner Aruna Rodrigues.

Rodrigues argues that GM mustard is being undemocratically forced through with [flawed tests \(or no tests\) and a lack of public scrutiny](#): in effect, there has been [unremitting scientific fraud and outright regulatory delinquency](#). Moreover, this crop is also herbicide-tolerant (HT), which, as stated by the TEC, is [wholly inappropriate](#) for a country like India with its small biodiverse, multi-cropping farms.

## GMOs in the food system

Despite official committees and reports advising against GMOs, they have already contaminated India's food system. Back in 2005, for instance, biologist Pushpa Bhargava noted that unapproved varieties of several GM seeds were being sold to farmers. In 2008, [Arun Shrivastava wrote](#) that illegal GM okra had been planted in India and poor farmers had been offered lucrative deals to plant 'special seed' of all sorts of vegetables.

In 2013, a group of scientists and NGOs protested in Kolkata and elsewhere against the introduction of transgenic brinjal in Bangladesh – a centre for origin and diversity of the vegetable – as it would give rise to contamination of the crop in India. In 2014, the [West Bengal government said](#) it had received information regarding "infiltration" of commercial seeds of GM Bt brinjal from Bangladesh.

In 2017, the illegal cultivation of a GM HT soybean was reported in Gujarat. Bhartiya Kisan Sangh, a national farmers organisation, claimed that Gujarat farmers had been cultivating the HT crop illegally. There are also reports of [HT cotton \(again illegally\) growing in India](#).

A study by the New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment [found](#) that due to lax enforcement, a [deeply flawed labelling system](#) and corporate deception, Indian supermarkets are inundated with GM foods. The results show the large-scale illegal presence and sale of GM processed foods in the country.

All of this is prompting calls for probes into the workings of the GEAC and other official

bodies which have been asleep at the wheel or deliberately looking the other way. The latter could be the case given that [senior figures in India](#) misguidedly regard GM seeds (and their associated chemical inputs) as key to 'modernising' Indian agriculture.

Despite reasoned argument and debate against the cultivation of GM crops or the consumption of GM food in India, we are witnessing GMOs entering India anyhow. Rohit Parakh of India for Safe Food says that the government's own data on the import of live seeds indicates that imports continue, including that of GM canola, GM sugar beet, GM papaya, GM squash and GM corn seeds (in addition to GM soybean) from countries such as the USA, with no approval from the GEAC.

In finishing let's look at a warning from 10 years ago, when it was predicted that Bt brinjal would fail within 4-12 years if introduced in India. It seems that's [precisely what has happened to Bt cotton](#) in the country. The last thing India needs is another ill thought out GMO experiment pushed through without proper independent assessments that consider health and environmental outcomes or the effects on farmers' livelihoods and rural communities.

Indeed, a [recent paper](#) by Prof Andrew Paul Gutierrez concludes that extending implementation of GM technology to other crops in India will only mirror the disastrous implementation of Bt cotton, thereby tightening the economic noose on still more subsistence farmers for the sake of profits.

It is therefore a timely and much needed intervention by a coalition of groups and individuals to put forward a call for a moratorium on GMOs.

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