

Is India's Record Cotton Production Attributable To Bt Cotton?

The Bt Cotton industry is going to town with the news that India has touched record cotton production this year with 250 lakh bales, an increase from 244 lakh bales last year. Notwithstanding the contestation of these claims of record production by some news reports [of lower production in India in 2006-07 than previous years and the artificial depressing of prices for farmers by such claims], the industry is also claiming that such increases in production and productivity are attributable to the increasing adoption of Bt Cotton in the country.

Coalition for GM-Free India rejects these false and convenient claims by the industry and its supporters in the government (including the agriculture minister), which would only mislead farmers into believing that Bt Cotton contributes to increase in yields. The biotech industry is using such false claims as part of their marketing strategy for pushing more Bt Cotton onto Indian farmers.

The following is the data on the Cotton area in the country (USDA data), Bt Cotton extents within cotton (ISAAA data), production and productivity per hectare (USDA data upto 2005-06 and media reports for 2006-07).

YEAR	Total Cotton area	Bt Cotton area	Total Cotton Production	Avg Yield per hectare
	In lakh hectares	In lakh hectares (%age of total cotton area)	In lakh bales [1 bale=170 kg] (%age increase from previous year)	In kilos (percentage increase from previous year)
2000-01	85.8	0	140	278
2001-02	87.3	0	158 (13)	308 (10.8)
2002-03	74.1	0.445 (0.6)	136 (-14)	312 (1.2)
2003-04	76.3	1 (1.3)	177 (30)	394 (26.3)
2004-05	80.6	5 (6.2)	232 (31)	440 (11.7)
2005-06	88.7	13 (14.6)	244 (5)	468 (6.4)
2006-07	89.0	35 (39)	250 (2)	478 (2.1)

Source: Compiled from USDA, ISAAA and media (2006-07 cotton production) data

The above table clearly points out that growth in Indian cotton production and productivity has fluctuated even before the introduction of Bt Cotton and has also shown impressive improvements in several years. For instance, Indian cotton productivity has shown a growth of 10.8% over the previous year even in 2001-02, when no Bt Cotton was allowed in the country.

In the year 2003-04, when Bt Cotton cultivation constituted a mere 1.3% of the total cotton extent, the highest increase in productivity upto 26.3% was seen.

If increasing Bt Cotton cultivation leads to increases in productivity, there should be a steady increase in the growth rate of production and yields per hectare in the country [given that Bt Cotton area increases are shown to be 2.6 times more than previous year in 2005-06 and 2006-07]. However, as the above table shows, while Bt Cotton is projected to be around 40% of all cotton cultivation in the country in 2006-07, up from around 15% in the earlier year, production has increased by only 2%, to touch 250 lakh bales from 244 lakh bales last year. Yield increase was only 2% more than the previous year, while area increases are projected at 2.6 times more than previous year, in 2005-06 and 2006-07.

This clearly shows that the reasons for increases in production and productivity, if any, should be looked for elsewhere.

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