

India budget 2013: A fillip for bioagri

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Giving a boost to agriculture in India, the Finance Minister of the country, Mr P Chidambaram, announced \$4.9 billion (Rs 27,049 crore) for the Ministry of Agriculture, which is a 22 percent increase on the current allocation for the sector. The announcement has raised the hopes in the agribiotechnology sector, especially in the eastern states of the country, as emphasis will be on crop diversification and innovation to drive a green revolution. [The Indian pharma and the biotech sectors, however, do not have reasons to smile as the budget fails to address their concerns.](#)

As part of its 'look east' policy, the government has proposed a \$184 million (Rs1,000 crore) allocation for agriculture in the eastern states in 2013-14. The finance minister mentioned that the budget has taken into consideration from suggestions from scientists.

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Mr Sushil Karwa, managing director, Krishidhan Group of Companies, India, said, "In Union Budget 2013-14, the finance minister has announced allocation of \$100 million (Rs 500 crore) to start a program in crop diversification and promote technological innovation along with \$683 million (Rs 3,415 crore) for agri-research. These provisions are very encouraging for the core players of agriculture and the biotech sector as it would help us to focus more on research and development."

He added that since the private sector is playing a leading role in biotech and agri sectors of the country, "We hope that government would channelize some funds in the private sector in the form of grants and soft loans to encourage it". "It would also motivate us to stress on developing innovative disease-resistant and drought-resistant seeds to deliver value added quality products that ensure higher yields at lower cost to farmers."

The budget proposed a pilot program on Nutri-Farms for introducing new crop varieties that are rich in micro-nutrients, such as iron-rich bajra, protein-rich maize and zinc-rich wheat. "I propose to provide a sum of up to \$36.7 million (Rs 200 crore) to start the pilots," he said, during his union budget speech. He also said that he hoped to see a sufficient number of such pilots in the districts most affected by malnutrition.

Institutions to promote agribio

Mr Chidambaram, who presented the Union Budget of India for the second time as the finance minister, informed parliament members that the government will establish an Indian Institute of Agricultural Bio-technology (IIAB) at Ranchi in Jharkhand, an eastern state of India. The institution will serve as a center of excellence in agricultural bio-technology.

Schools proposed under the institution, which will be a deemed university, will lead research in genomics, bioinformatics, genetic engineering, nano biotechnology, diagnostics and prophylaxis and basic and social sciences and commercialization. The Union Cabinet approved the setting up of the institute under the 12th Five Year Plan in August 2012.

The institute will be mandated to undertake multi-disciplinary basic and strategic research with a view to future developing crops for traits such as increased yield, or increased tolerance to biotic and abiotic stress. It would also design and start academic programs to develop the highly trained manpower required for fundamental research in agricultural biotechnology, and award post-graduate doctoral and post-doctoral degrees.

The deemed university will also provide its research output to breeders and developers in agricultural universities and other institutions, to develop the germplasm and vaccines among others, which would enhance productivity and reduce losses due to biotic and abiotic stress. IIAB would also act as a mother institute that would provide both curricula and course material to India's agricultural universities and other institutions who are running or trying to establish successful agricultural biotechnology graduate and post graduate programs.

The government also announced launch of another initiative, named the National Institute of Biotic Stress Management (NIBSM), for addressing plant protection issues. It will be established at Raipur, Chhattisgarh, a state in central India.