

South Asia Biosafety Program

NEWSLETTER FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY – NOT FOR SALE



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INDIA

Launch of Two Genome-Edited Rice Varieties by India

Dr. Vibha Ahuja, Biotech Consortium India Limited



Rice field in India © Beritk | Dreamstime.com

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has developed India's first genome-edited rice varieties—DRR Rice 100 (Kamla) and Pusa DST Rice 1—with the objective of bringing about revolutionary changes in terms of higher production, climate adaptability, and water conservation. The official announcement was made by Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Shri Shivraj Singh Chauhan, during a national event held on 4 May 2025 in New Delhi. These new varieties were developed using genome-editing technology based on CRISPR-Cas.

The DRR Rice 100 (Kamala) variety was developed by the ICAR-Indian Institute of Rice Research (IIRR) in Hyderabad, based on Samba Mahsuri

(BPT 5204). Researchers edited a cytokinin oxidase gene (*OsCKX2*), developing a novel allele. The result was a 19% boost in grain yield, earlier maturity by up to 20 days (~130 days), and better performance under

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low-fertilizer and drought conditions. Due to its shorter duration, it helps save water and fertilizers and reduces methane gas emissions. Its stalk is strong and does not fall. The rice quality is similar to the original variety, Samba Mahsuri.

The second variety, Pusa DST Rice 1, was developed by the ICAR-Indian Agriculture Research Institute (IARI) in New Delhi. It is based on MTU 1010 for improved drought and salt tolerance. By knocking out a gene responsible for suppressing stress resistance, the scientists achieved plants with

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Union Agriculture Minister Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan Announces Two Genome-Edited Rice Varieties Developed in India (4 May 2025)

reduced stomatal density and water use, alongside improved tillering, grain yield, and salt resilience. Field tests showed significantly higher yields under drought and saline stress compared to the parent MTU1010 variety. This variety can increase yields by 9.66% to 30.4% in saline and alkaline soils, with the potential for up to a 20% increase in production.

These genome-edited rice varieties were developed for states such as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala (Zone VII), Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh (Zone V), Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal (Zone III). Field evaluations have been conducted across multiple agroecological zones.

Shri Chauhan felicitated the lead scientists, Dr. Viswanathan Chinnusamy from ICAR-IARI and Dr. Satendra Kumar Mangrauthia from



Lead scientist, Dr. Viswanath Chinnusamy, ICAR-IARI.



Dr. R.M. Sundaram, Director, ICAR-IIRR, explaining key features of the two varieties (4 May 2025).

ICAR-IIRR, along with their teams, at the event. Addressing the gathering, Shri Chauhan highlighted the role of genome editing in delivering next-generation varietal solutions. He emphasized that such innovations are pivotal for enhancing farmers' incomes, climate resilience, and national food security. He reaffirmed the government's support for enabling policy frameworks that promote science-led growth in agriculture.

The development of these crops follows years of groundwork by Indian researchers. India's policy framework exempting certain genome-edited plants from GMO regulations helped accelerate their path to approval.



Lead scientist, Dr. Satendra Kumar Mangrauthia, ICAR-IIRR.

Genome Editing Research Initiatives in India: The Way Forward

Ajay Kumar Thakur, Neha Sharma, and Brajesh Singh, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Central Potato Research Institute



Potato field in India © Samrat35 | Dreamstime.com

Genome editing, a New Breeding Technique (NBT), has fascinated plant biologists worldwide. This technique for crop improvement has allowed the development of biotic stress-resistant traits, climate-resilient crop varieties, and products with improved quality. The recent development of a new biosafety regulatory policy for genome edited crops by the government of India, wherein SDN-1 and SDN-2 categories of genome edited events have been exempted from stringent biosafety regulations, has provided an impetus for genome editing research initiatives in India. Various government organizations, including the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Department of Biotechnology (DBT), and Department of Science and Technology (DST), have started funding genome editing research for various crops.

Recently, ICAR launched a mega project on “Enabling Climate Resilience and Ensuring Food & Nutritional Security Through Genome Editing in Agricultural and Horticultural Crops,” covering major agricultural and horticultural crops in crop-based research institutes of ICAR. Furthermore, ICAR has also launched the “All India Network Project on Biotech Crops” to support translation work on transgenic and gene edited crops. DBT is funding a number of consortium-based network projects in various crops, including rice, maize, Indian mustard, potato, and tomato, under the platform “Genome Editing of Crops for Enhanced Attributes.”

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Department of Biotechnology (DBT), and Department of Science and Technology (DST), have started funding genome editing research for various crops.

DBT is also supporting research grants to enhance the capacity of scientists working on genome editing and is collaborating with international organizations, such as the Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum, on initiatives related to genome engineering and gene editing. ICAR is also sending its scientists to distinguished labs abroad to develop expertise in the domain of genome editing.

There is a need to create awareness among stakeholders about the positive aspects of this technology to reap the real benefits of genome edited crops. The recent release of two genome edited rice varieties by the government of India has opened the gateway for many genome edited products to get to the market in the coming years. A list of various crops where genome editing work is being carried out, along with target traits, is summarized on the next page in Table 1.

LINK

For a more detailed reading, please refer to the following journal article:

Sharma N, Thakur K, Zinta R, Mangal V, Dalamu, Tiwari JK, Sood S, Dutt S, Kumar V, Singh B, Thakur AK. 2025. Genome editing research initiatives and regulatory landscape of genome edited crops in India. Transgenic Res. 34:13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11248-025-00432-1>

Continued on page 4

| S.NO. | CROP | TRAIT |
|----------------------------------|----------------|--|
| A) CEREALS: | | |
| 1. | Rice | Drought and salinity tolerance, bacterial blight and blast resistance, herbicide resistance, higher yield, <i>de novo</i> domestication, nitrogen use efficiency (NUE), blast and blight resistance, nematode resistance, virus resistance |
| 2. | Wheat | Nitrogen use efficiency (NUE) and phosphorus use efficiency (PUE), heat stress, salinity and herbicide tolerance, biofortification of Fe and Zn, resistant starch |
| 3. | Maize | Development of haploid inducer lines, enhanced kernel number per plant, high amylose/low glycemic maize, BLSB resistance, root architecture improvement and herbicide tolerance |
| B) PULSES: | | |
| 1. | Chickpea | Fusarium wilt resistance, drought tolerance, improving productivity and nodulation |
| 2. | Pigeon Pea | Productivity improvement |
| 3. | Grass Pea | Anti-nutritional factor removal |
| 4. | Urd Bean | Tolerance to MVYV and UCLV, and productivity enhancement |
| 5. | Lentil | Productivity enhancement |
| C) OILSEED CROPS: | | |
| 1. | Indian Mustard | Early flowering, improved grain and oil yield, shattering resistance, improved plant architecture, stem rot resistance, orobanche resistance, development of haploid inducer lines, reduced seed glucosinolate content, low erucic acid |
| 2. | Groundnut | Enhanced oil content |
| 3. | Soybean | Seed and oil content, insect resistance, pod shattering resistance, resistance to Yellow Mosaic Disease (YMD), high oleic acid content, photo-insensitivity, drought, water-logging and salinity tolerance |
| 4. | Castor | Bio-detoxification |
| 5. | Sunflower | Powdery mildew resistance |
| 6. | Sesame | Shattering resistance, determinate habit and high oleic acid oil, more number of seeds per capsule, high oil content and seed weight |
| 7. | Linseed | More 1000-seed weight, early flowering |
| D) MILLETS: | | |
| 1. | Pearl Millet | Enhanced grain yield, enhanced shelf life |
| 2. | Foxtail Millet | Enhanced grain yield |
| 3. | Finger Millet | Enhanced grain yield, drought stress tolerance |
| 4. | Sorghum | Herbicide tolerance |
| E) CASH/COMMERCIAL CROPS: | | |
| 1. | Sugarcane | Drought tolerance, enhanced sucrose content, greater number of tillers, enhanced biomass, red rot and virus resistance, reduced lignin content |
| 2. | Cotton | Tolerance to premature square and boll shedding, compact architecture trait, determinate sympodial shoots, improved seed oil quality and content, fiber quality, enhanced yield |
| 3. | Jute | Resistance to short-day flowering, herbicide tolerance, improved fiber quality, heat stress tolerance, and development of haploid inducer lines |
| F) FRUIT CROPS: | | |
| 1. | Apple | Early flowering and drought tolerance |
| 2. | Papaya | Resistance to papaya ringspot virus (PRSV) |

Table 1: List of various crops along with the target trait(s) for genome editing research in India (continued on the following page).

| S.NO. | CROP | TRAIT |
|-------------------------|--------------|--|
| 3. | Banana | Multiple diseases and virus resistance, biofortified banana with enriched vitamin A content, development of seed-less Bhimkol banana |
| 4. | Grape | Powdery mildew resistance |
| G) VEGETABLE CROPS: | | |
| 1. | Potato | Late blight resistance, bacterial wilt resistance, potato scab resistance, High temperature tolerance, enhancement of folic acid, vitamin D, yield, reducing glycemic index level & steroid glycoalkaloids (SGA) content, development of haploid inducer lines |
| 2. | Tomato | Resistance to ToLCD, fusarium wilt, enhancement of Total Soluble Sugars (TSS), vitamin D content, enhanced post-harvest life and nutrition quality, modification of plant architecture for enhanced yield |
| 3. | Chilli | Resistance to chilli leaf curl virus (chilli LCV), potyvirus, and anthracnose disease |
| 4. | Cucumber | Resistance to powdery mildew disease |
| 5. | Muskmelon | For delayed fruit ripening, modifying ripening behavior, and extended shelf life |
| 6. | Onion | Heat and drought tolerance, and development of male sterile lines |
| 7. | Cassava | Low amylose starch lines and resistant starch lines |
| H) SPICES: | | |
| 1. | Black Pepper | Resistance to Phytophthora disease |
| 2. | Ginger | Resistance to <i>Ralstonia solanacearum</i> and <i>Pythium</i> disease |
| 3. | Cumin | Resistance to Alternaria blight disease |
| 4. | Coriander | Resistance to stem gall disease |
| I) FLORICULTURAL CROPS: | | |
| 1. | Marigold | Enhanced lutein and zeaxanthin content, and development of haploid inducer lines |

Table 1: List of various crops along with the target trait(s) for genome editing research in India (continued from the previous page).

INDIA

Biological Diversity (Access to Biological Resources and Associated Knowledge and Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits) Regulations, 2025

Dr. Suhas Nimbalkar, Partner & Consultant–IP & Regulatory Affairs, eitimo Ventures LLP, Dr. Prabha Nair, Associate Professor (Law), CHRIST (Deemed to be University) NCR–Ghaziabad, and Dr. Vibha Ahuja, Chief General Manager, Biotech Consortium India Limited

Pursuant to the amended *Biological Diversity (Amendment) Act, 2023* and *Biological Diversity Rules, 2024*, a new set of rules to manage the sharing of benefits generated through the use of biological resources has been released. The *Biological Diversity (Access to Biological Resources and Knowledge Associated thereto and Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits) Regulations, 2025* were notified on 29 April 2025. These regulations replace the *Guidelines on Access to Biological Resources and Associated Knowledge and Benefits Sharing Regulations, 2014*.

The major updates in the new regulations are briefly explained in this article

1. EXPANDED SCOPE TO INCLUDE DSI

The scope of the regulations has been expanded to include Digital Sequence Information (DSI), in addition to biological resources and associated traditional knowledge. The regulations apply to all individuals or entities (institutions, Indian companies, and foreign entities) accessing Indian biological resources or traditional knowledge or DSI for purposes such as:

- Research, bio-surveys, and bio-utilization
- Commercial utilization
- Intellectual property rights (IPR)
- Transfer of research results
- Deposition of microbial strains abroad

2. BENEFIT SHARING LINKED TO TURNOVER

A tiered model of benefit-sharing has been introduced, pegged to the annual turnover of the applicant entity, making the obligations proportionate to the scale of operations:

| ANNUAL TURNOVER | BENEFIT SHARING RATE ¹ |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Up to Rs 5 crore | Exempt |
| Rs 5-50 crore | 0.2% |
| Rs 50-250 crore | 0.4% |
| Above Rs 250 crore | 0.6% |

¹ % of the annual gross ex-factory sale price of the product (excluding government taxes).

3. HIGH-VALUE BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

For high-value biological resources like red sanders, sandalwood, agarwood, and threatened species under the *Biodiversity Act, 2002*, benefit sharing must be at least 5% of the sale or auction amount, and can exceed 20% for commercial use.

4. STREAMLINED PROCEDURES FOR SECTION 7 ENTITIES—INTRODUCTION OF “DEEMED APPROVAL”

Applications from Indian companies for the commercial use of biological resources require formal approval from State Biodiversity Boards. Under the new rules, if the Board or Union Territory Council does not act on the application (Form B) within 15 days, the application is automatically deemed approved for one year. This change introduces a predictable and time-bound system, significantly improving the ease of doing business for Indian industries and reducing bureaucratic delays.

5. RESEARCH, PATENTS, AND COMMERCIALIZATION

Differentiated benefit-sharing obligations have been introduced depending on how the biological resources are used:

- For academic or non-commercial research, benefit-sharing may be waived.
- If the research leads to a patented product or process, benefit-sharing obligations arise when the IP is commercialized. If the applicant uses the IP directly, they must pay up to 1% of sales.
- If the IP is licensed to a third party, up to 5% of the license/royalty income must be shared.
- When traditional knowledge is involved in the innovation, the benefit-sharing amount is increased by 25% to ensure community compensation.

A very important revision is that in the event of the applicant accessing the biological resource for commercial utilization during the existence of intellectual property rights, the applicant shall share the benefits only under this regulation (regulation 8 or 9) and not under regulation 4 or 5.

6. PROCEDURES FOR ACCESS, APPROVAL, AND COMPLIANCE

The process of accessing biological resources for commercial use involves:

- Filing an application (Form A/B) with the necessary fees and documents
- Agreeing to mutually agreed terms and conditions
- Getting approval (explicit or deemed) from the relevant Board or Council
- If modifications are made to the application terms, the applicant must respond within 15 days, or the application is closed. Applicants can appeal rejected applications to the National Green Tribunal (NGT). Boards must now respond within 15 days, a strict timeline enforced to avoid indefinite delays.

7. DEPOSITION OF MICROBIAL STRAINS ABROAD

Indian scientists discovering novel microbial strains and wishing to deposit them in foreign repositories for publication must:

- File Form E with the National Biodiversity Authority
- Deposit a voucher specimen in a designated Indian repository
- Ensure the foreign institution is aware that Indian legal clearance is mandatory before any third party can access and use the deposited strain
- This ensures India's sovereign rights are respected in international scientific databases.

8. FLEXIBILITY IN BENEFIT SHARING MODELS

The 2025 guidelines broaden the definition of benefit-sharing to include both:

- Monetary contributions (e.g., upfront payments, royalties, contributions to biodiversity funds, funding for Indian R&D, joint ventures)
- Non-monetary contributions (e.g., training, technology transfer, community infrastructure, conservation activities, scholarships, local employment generation)

This approach allows applicants to negotiate mutually beneficial terms based on sector-specific needs and local development goals, especially when innovations support public goods like health or environmental protection.

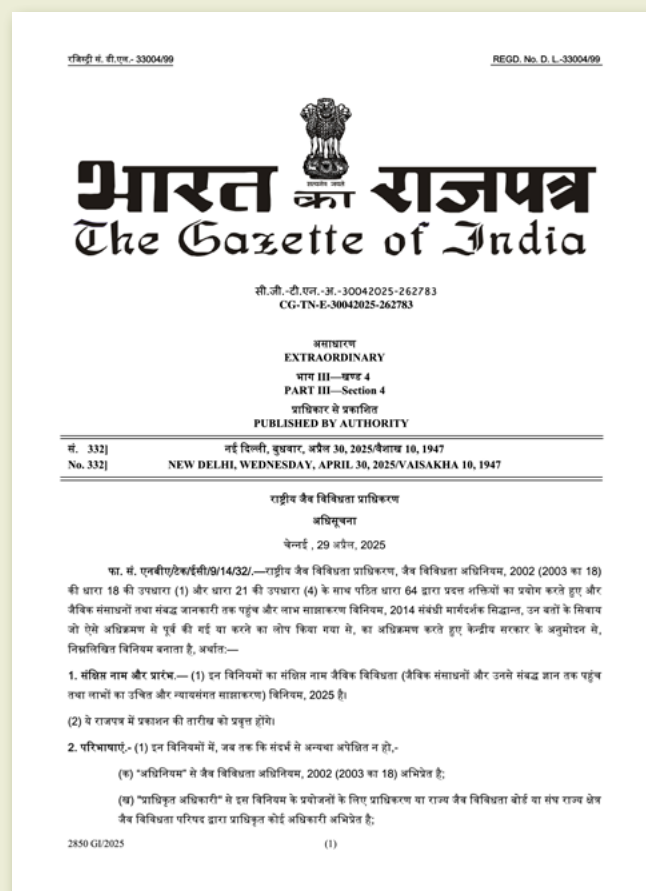
9. DISTRIBUTION AND USE OF BENEFIT FUNDS

Once benefits are received:

- 10-15% is retained by the approving Authority or State Board
- The rest is distributed to Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) and benefit claimants (individuals or communities contributing resources or knowledge)
- If the origin of the biological resource is unknown, the full amount may be retained by the NBA for biodiversity conservation and local development, as per the Act.

Further, interest earned and penalties collected are earmarked for supporting biodiversity conservation and improving community livelihoods.

This approach allows applicants to negotiate mutually beneficial terms based on sector-specific needs and local development goals, especially when innovations support public goods like health or environmental protection.

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The regulations can be accessed at:

<https://egazette.gov.in>

(Search by Gazette ID: CG-TN-E-30042025-262783)

Engineering Biology Aspirations: A Report by the UK Government Office for Science

Dr. Vibha Ahuja, Chief General Manager, Biotech Consortium India Limited

Engineering biology is a fast-moving field of biotechnology that combines principles from biology, engineering, and computer science to design, construct, and commercialize new or modified biology-derived products and services with the objective of addressing challenges in areas such as medicine, agriculture, and environmental sustainability. There is a lot of interest among countries to use these novel technologies. In this context, the UK Government Office for Science published a report on *Engineering Biology Aspirations* in April 2025. The report includes a set of five evidence-based case studies covering a diverse range of sectors and applications, viz., agriculture and food, chemicals and materials, health, defence, and national security and resilience.

The aim of the report is to communicate the potential benefits that engineering biology might bring to society and the economy over the next 10 years or beyond. The case studies begin with an aspiration statement describing the goal in 2035. The problems highlighted in the report, and potential solutions engineering biology could offer, are excerpted below:

Bio-Synthetic Fuels: Redesigning microbes to manufacture sustainable fuels and chemicals from waste.

Imagine a world where clean, fossil-free fuels can be produced right where they are needed. Using microorganisms and the power of engineering biology, waste materials can be turned into fuel for homes and businesses, recycling carbon rather than removing it from the ground, creating a more sustainable circular economy. This could have huge benefits for applications in defence, farming, and humanitarian missions. Local microbe-powered fuel factories could also be game-changing for remote areas, such as islands, where transporting fuel is difficult and costly. Microbe-powered factories can help meet a diverse range of energy needs and build a more sustainable future.

Nitrogen-Fixing Cereals: Engineering a new generation of crops to tackle global food shortages and drive forward sustainable agriculture.

Imagine a world where humanity's main source of carbohydrates—cereal crops like wheat and barley—can generate their own nitrogen fertilizer. This would address one of the most significant challenges in agriculture, enhance crop yields worldwide, and yield enormous environmental benefits. Cereals currently require industrially produced nitrogen fertilizers that are a major contributor to global warming and cause catastrophic nitrogen pollution in waterways. Engineering biology offers radically new ways to develop self-fertilizing cereals, paving the way to more sustainable agriculture.

Future Fashion: Harnessing the power of microorganisms to create cleaner and safer ways of making our clothes, footwear, and accessories.

Imagine a world where every piece of your clothing comes at minimal cost to the environment. Your sweater is made of fibers and yarns produced from regenerative resources, and your shoes are assembled locally with components from a resilient supply chain. The adhesives, foams, and trims used in your bag are bio-based and recyclable in a single process, with zero waste going to landfills. Even if a piece of clothing is accidentally discarded into the environment, it safely biodegrades to leave no trace of its existence. This is the future of fashion, and engineering biology is helping to make it happen.

Lab-Grown Blood: Creating a safe and unlimited source of blood for all.

Imagine a world where no patient dies due to a lack of compatible blood during surgery, accidents, or medical crises. It's a world where lab-grown blood is produced in huge factories and available on demand. The blood is engineered to be more universally compatible with a range of blood groups. It is also free of disease transmission risks and is easier to store. Although blood services will still collect human blood, sourcing

[LINK](#)


The full report can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/engineering-biology-aspirations-report>

rare blood types for transfusions is no longer a challenge. The logistics of supplying safe and compatible blood is vastly improved, enabling faster responses to military or humanitarian situations and providing a more sustainable and equitable blood supply for all.

Microbial Metal Factories: Forging a sustainable future for the metals our industries rely on.

Imagine a world where we've solved metal scarcity. Engineered microbes work tirelessly to extract and recycle metals from electronic waste, so that we no longer rely on harmful mining practices. A secure, domestic supply of biorecovered metals has reduced our dependence on imports, particularly from conflict-affected areas. These vital metals power our green energy technologies, enabling our cities to thrive. In this future, engineering biology underpins global sustainability goals and shows that economic progress can coexist with environmental preservation.

The case studies above showcase the transformative potential of engineering biology. However, there are significant challenges that need to be overcome to realize these benefits. These include scaling up, long-term funding, addressing public perception, navigating regulatory landscapes, and fostering fundamental research and skill development. As indicated in the report, the full potential of this technology can be unlocked by fostering a supportive regulatory environment, investing in infrastructure and training, and effectively communicating with the public about the benefits.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

| EVENT | ORGANIZED BY | DATE | WEBSITE |
|--|--|---|--|
| INDIA | | | |
| Hands-On Training in Carbon Capture and Biofuels | International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) | 9-13 June 2025 New Delhi | https://www.icgeb.org/carbon-capture-and-biofuels-new-delhi-2025/ |
| International Conference on Ornamental Horticulture (ICOH-2025): From Science to Society | Tamil Nadu Agricultural University | 26-28 June 2025 Coimbatore | https://tnau.ac.in/news-2/ |
| 7 th South Asian Biotechnology Conference | South Asian University and the International Centre for Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology (ICGEB) | 29-31 October 2025 New Delhi | https://sabc.sau.ac.in https://www.icgeb.org/south-asian-biotechnology-conference-india-2025/ |
| INTERNATIONAL | | | |
| Seventh Regional Biosafety Workshop | Korea Institute for Promoting Asia Biosafety Cooperation (KIPABiC) and the Bhutan Food and Drug Authority (BFDA), Ministry of Health, Royal Government of Bhutan | 27-30 May 2025 Paro, Bhutan | https://www.bfda.gov.bt https://asiabchfamily.org/?menuno=135 |
| FAO Global Agrifood Biotechnologies Conference: Biotechnologies for a Sustainable Future - Driving Agrifood Systems Transformation | Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) | 16-18 June 2025 Rome, Italy | https://www.fao.org/events/detail/fao-biotech-conference-2025/en/ |
| International Training Course on Risk Assessments of Living Modified Organisms | CBD Secretariat | 2-6 June 2025 Brasilia, Brazil | https://www.cbd.int/meetings?thm=CPB |
| Meeting of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Risk Assessment | CBD Secretariat | 8-11 July 2025 Montreal, Canada | https://www.cbd.int/meetings?thm=CPB |
| Twenty-Seventh Meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice | CBD Secretariat | 20-24 October 2025 Panama City, Panama | https://www.cbd.int/meetings?thm=CPB |
| 17 th ISBR Symposium (ISBR 2025) | International Society for Biosafety Research | 2-6 November 2025 Ghent, Belgium | https://isbr.info/ |
| 2025 Asian Seed Congress | Asia and Pacific Seed Alliance (APSA), National Seed Association of India (NSAI), and Federation of Seed Industry of India (FSII) | 17-21 November 2025 Mumbai, India | https://web.apsaseed.org/asc2025 |



SOUTH ASIA
BIOSAFETY PROGRAM

The South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP) is an international development program implemented in India and Bangladesh by the Agriculture & Food Systems Institute (AFSI). SABP aims to work with national governmental agencies and other public sector partners to facilitate the implementation of transparent, efficient, and responsive regulatory frameworks for products of modern biotechnology that meet national goals as regards the safety of novel foods and feeds, and environmental protection.



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