

South Asia Biosafety Program

NEWSLETTER FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY – NOT FOR SALE



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SRI LANKA

Second Capacity Building Workshop on Food Safety Assessment of Genetically Modified Plants in Colombo

Dr. Ananda Jayalal, Deputy Director General, Environmental Health, Occupational Health, and Food Safety Unit, Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka



Speakers and participants at the Second Capacity Building Workshop on Food Safety Assessment of Genetically Modified Plants in Colombo, Sri Lanka (11 December 2025).

The “Second Capacity Building Workshop on Food Safety Assessment of Genetically Modified Plants” was organized on 11-13 December 2025 at the Taj Samudra in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The objective of the workshop was to provide in-depth technical information about the purpose, design, and conduct of studies used to inform safety assessments of foods and feeds derived from genetically modified (GM) plants. This workshop was part of the South Asia Harmonization Initiative, wherein an Expert Working Group (EWG) consisting of experts from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Sri Lanka suggested a common approach for safety assessment of GM foods based on *Codex Alimentarius Principles and Guidelines*. This approach is documented in the EWG report—*Towards a Harmonised Approach to Food Safety Assessment of Genetically Engineered Plants in South Asia*—and various in-country capacity building initiatives were conducted as part of this project, including the first capacity building workshop for Sri Lanka on 22-23 September 2025 in Colombo.

The three-day technical training program on GM food and feed safety assessment was implemented by the Agriculture and Food Systems

Lectures, exercises, and breakout discussions included a review of a regulatory dossier, taking into account the Sri Lanka Guidelines for GM Food and Feed Safety Assessment.

Institute (AFSI), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, together with Biotech Consortium India Limited (BCIL). With speakers from India, the Philippines, and the USA, the workshop provided training to 21 participants, including officials from Sri Lanka’s Ministry of Health, members of the food regulatory committee, and technical experts. Participants were introduced to key components of GM food safety assessment aligned with the consensus approach outlined by the EWG and practical considerations for handling and use of GM foods. Lectures, exercises, and breakout discussions included a review of a regulatory dossier, taking into account the *Sri Lanka Guidelines for GM Food and Feed Safety Assessment*.

In the opening session, Dr. T.B. Ananda Jayalal, Deputy Director General, Environmental Health, Occupational Health, and Food Safety Unit, Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka, welcomed all participants and thanked AFSI and BCIL for facilitating the second capacity building workshop on GM food safety assessment in Sri Lanka for members of the food regulatory committee and technical experts. Dr. Bhavneet Bajaj, Senior Manager–Scientific Programs at AFSI, introduced participants to the

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Dr. Vibha Ahuja speaking during the opening session.

Agriculture and Food Systems Institute and its South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP). She discussed the activities under South Asia Harmonization Initiative, the outputs, and agenda for the workshop.

Dr. Vibha Ahuja, SABP Senior Advisor and former Chief General Manager of BCIL, delivered the keynote presentation on "Safety of Foods and Feeds Derived from GM Plants: A Historical Perspective and Status." She highlighted the fact that GM crops are being cultivated and traded across countries, with about 30 crops globally approved and grown in 30 countries, on more than 200 million hectares.

Dr. Flerida A. Cariño, Consultant for the Philippines Food and Drug Administration and former Professor of Biochemistry at the University of the Philippines-Diliman, delivered the presentation on "Key Concepts for the Safety Assessment of GM Plants." She explained that the safety of GM foods is determined through a comparative assessment of the GM plant with its conventional counterpart and focused on the defined differences between the GM food/feed and its conventional counterpart(s). She indicated that there is international consensus on the approach, as well as the information and data used to assess GM food safety. She highlighted the importance of history of safe use (HOSU) and the comparison of key nutrients, anti-nutrients, toxins, and potential allergens (NATA).

Dr. Ananda Jayalal spoke about GM food regulations in Sri Lanka. He informed participants that the regulations were drafted in 2001, and there is an urgent need to review these regulations, considering the extensive experience and current status of GM crops.



Dr. Ananda Jayalal speaking during the opening session.

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Dr. Bajaj discussed molecular characterization as part of general considerations and composition assessment as part of safety considerations. Additional technical presentations focusing on the assessment of possible toxicity and allergenicity were given by Drs. Cariño and Ahuja, along with exercises that participants completed in groups. Dr. Bajaj also discussed internet resources for food safety assessment to illustrate the existing wealth of information pertaining to risk/safety assessment of GE events. The participants also prepared a risk assessment summary for a GM cowpea event using the format developed by the EWG.

Practical considerations in regulating/handling GM plants and derived products were discussed by Dr. Ahuja on the final day of the workshop. These included understanding the regulatory authority for GM food safety, subject of the safety assessment, regulation of processed food and feed products, submission of safety data, data transportability, low level presence, and detection techniques.



Dr. Flerida A. Cariño assisting participants during the breakout group exercises.



Dr. Bhavneet Bajaj assisting participants during the breakout group exercises.

Leveraging Experience to Support Contemporary Risk Assessments: EPA's Case-By-Case Considerations for Ecological Risk Assessment of Plant-Incorporated Protectants and the Increased Role of Scientific Rationale

Plant-incorporated protectants (PIPs) are biological substances produced and used in living plants for pesticidal purposes. On 17 December 2025, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released a guidance document discussing the EPA's case-by-case approach in considering ecological data needs for PIPs, which includes an outline of types of ecological data historically received for PIPs (with an emphasis on insect resistance traits), case-specific factors that may play a role in data needs, and the contributions that familiarity and scientific rationale can play in risk characterization. This information can be utilized to inform data needs for future PIP submissions. For case-by-case recommendations, EPA welcomes pre-submission meetings to discuss a prospective registrant's specific PIP product.

The key points in the guidance are summarized as follows:

- **Case-by-Case Approach:** The EPA does not have formal data requirements for PIPs. Instead, data needs are determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the specific features of the PIP and the plant in which it has been genetically engineered.
- **Experience-Based Risk Assessment:** Building on thirty years of experience, the EPA has highlighted instances where data has previously been considered effective or potentially superfluous to PIP risk characterization. The types of ecological data historically received have been outlined.
- **Pre-Submission Meetings Encouraged:** To facilitate a comprehensive risk assessment process, the EPA encourages prospective registrants to consider whether scientific rationales may be sufficient in lieu of testing and to consult with the agency in pre-submission meetings to discuss their specific PIP product as needed.

Access the guidance document using the link below:

<https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2025-12/pip-ecological-data-needs-dec2025.pdf>

An "Overview of Plant Incorporated Protectants" is available on the EPA's website:

<https://www.epa.gov/regulation-biotechnology-under-tsca-and-fifra/overview-plant-incorporated-protectants>

Biotechnology Update from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Since 1982, biotechnology has had an increasing impact on the programmes of different sectors at Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), such as agriculture and trade, the environment, science, technology, and innovation. The Internal Co-ordination Group for Biotechnology (ICGB) was established in 1993 to facilitate coordination among member countries on issues related to biotechnology, and its newsletter provides up-to-date information on activities related to biotechnology or the life sciences more generally at the OECD.

The OECD released *ICGB Newsletter No. 48* in December 2025. This issue contains information about various reports released over the past year and is very informative for the wider biotech community, in addition to OECD delegations.

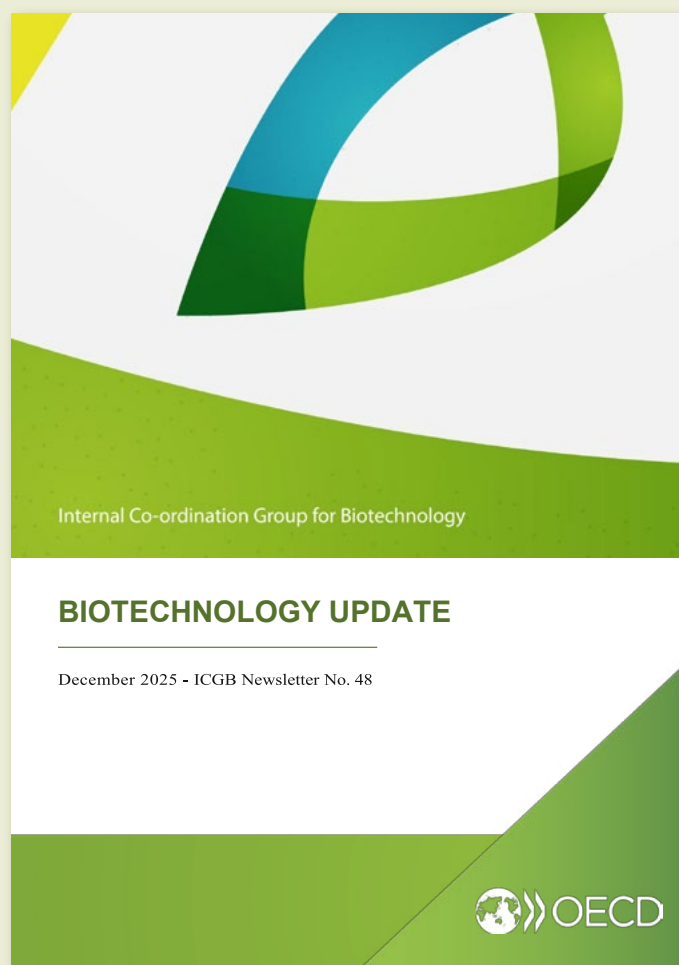
Below are some of the key reports listed in the newsletter:

- Developments in Delegations on the Safety Assessment of Novel Foods and Feeds, March 2024-March 2025
- Developments in Delegations on Biosafety Issues, March 2024-March 2025
- Collation of the Answers for the Questionnaire on Enhanced Information Exchange on New Breeding Techniques: 2025 Results
- Boosting Biotechnology Innovation Through Agile Regulation and Finance Instruments
- Synthetic Biology, AI, and Automation: A Forward-Looking Technology Assessment

Access the newsletter at the links below:

https://issuu.com/oecd.publishing/docs/oecd_work_on_biotechnology_issue_no_48_dec_2025 (read online)

<https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/biosafety-novel-food-and-feed-safety.html#update> (download PDF)



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

EVENT	ORGANIZED BY	DATE	WEBSITE
INDIA			
ICAR-Sponsored Short Course on New Frontiers in Seed Quality Testing for Sustainable Agriculture	ICAR-National Institute of Seed Science and Technology	16-25 January 2026 Mau	https://seedicar.org.in/?playlist=da5a817&video=1fbc49b
Training Programme on Genome Edited and Genetically Engineered (GE) Crops: Biosafety Considerations, Policies, Challenges, and Detection Strategies	ICAR-National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources	19-24 January 2026 New Delhi (Virtual)	https://nbpgr.org.in/nbpgr2023/
International Conference on New Age Technologies for Nutritious, Sustainable, and Resilient Global Rice Systems (ICRGRS 2025)	ICAR-Indian Institute of Rice Research, ICAR-Central Rice Research Institute, and Society for Advancement of Rice Research	23-25 January 2026 Hyderabad	https://www.icar-iirr.org/index.php/en/
Training Course on Innovative Breeding Approaches for Quality Improvement in Crop Plants	Centre for Plant Breeding and Genetics, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University	21 January-10 February 2026 Coimbatore	https://tnau.ac.in/news-2/
National Conference on Advances in Breeding to Harness Multiple Biotic Stress Resistance in Major Field Crops (Bioresbred-2026)	University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad	1-3 February 2026 Dharwad	https://uasd.edu/en/
Winter School on Translational Genomics for Climate Resilient Cultivar Development	ICAR-Indian Institute of Agricultural Biotechnology	3-23 February 2026 Ranchi	http://www.icar-iiab.res.in/#gsc.tab=0
National Oilseeds Conference	Society for Rapeseed-Mustard Research	6-8 February 2026 New Delhi	https://www.drmmr.res.in/
Training Programme on Emerging Plant Health Issues and their Management under Changing Climate Scenario	Centre of Advanced Faculty Training, G.B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology	6-26 February 2026 Pantnagar	https://www.gbpuat.ac.in/
National Conference on Pulses, Plant and People: Sustainable Livelihood and Nutritional Security Under Changing Climate Scenario (NCPulses 2026)	Indian Society of Pulses Research and Development (ISPRD), ICAR-Indian Institute of Pulses Research, and ICAR	10-12 February 2026 Kanpur	https://www.icar-iipr.org.in/
ICAR-Sponsored Short Course on Biotechnological and Conventional Tools for Biotic and Abiotic Stress Management	School of Agricultural Biotechnology, Punjab Agricultural University	10-19 February 2026 Ludhiana	https://pauwp.pau.edu/pau-upcoming-events/
National Symposium on Synergies for Sustainability: Fostering Academia-Industry Collaboration in Plant Health Management	Himalayan Phytopathological Society and Department of Plant Pathology, Dr. YS Parmar University of Horticulture & Forestry	27-28 February 2026 Palampur	https://www.yspuniversity.ac.in/
INTERNATIONAL			
Indian Seed Congress 2026	National Seed Association of India	26-28 February 2026 Phuket, Thailand	https://isc.nsai.co.in/



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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