Research required before low nicotine tobacco adoption'

Nov 09, 2016, 09.26 PM IST

New Delhi, Nov 9 (IANS) There needs to be extensive research on the consequences of adoption of very low nicotine level tobacco on farmers, consumers and the environment, experts said on Wednesday.

The experts also said that the research should precisely try to figure out the economic cost to the nation before the entire project is adopted.

"It is incorrect to target only nicotine as part of harm reduction research as other content like tar and other compounds hold greater importance," said K.D. Singh, former Director, Central Tobacco Research Institute.

"It is possible to manipulate the nicotine content and other compounds by adopting superior processes like organic cultivation and fast curing which are locally more relevant. We need thorough research before considering measures like low nicotine tobacco for Indian farmers," Singh said.

The discussion was held by business chamber Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) on Wednesday to discuss underlying issues and challenges for Indian tobacco growers.

"In India, the practice is to import technology instead of investing in local R&D (research and development). Indian scientists are fully capable of developing new varieties of tobacco which would be more suitable to Indian farm conditions," said Shashi Kumar Rhode, Scientist, International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB).

"India has the capability to be the number one exporter of tobacco by developing new varieties which the world needs, and we should be given the time and opportunity to develop those," Rhode said.

The panel brought together agri-scientists, tobacco experts and growers and included experts with extensive experience in the field of farming, genetic engineering, and biotechnology, members of farmer organisations and industry representatives.

G. Satyanarayana, Member - Tobacco Board, said: "Many of the major tobacco growing countries have not signed WHO FCTC (World Health Organisation's framework Convention on Tobacco Control) and will continue to produce high nicotine tobacco. If low nicotine tobacco is forced on Indian farmers, they may suffer huge economic loss in the international market as tobacco from other countries is likely to gain market share."

Before proposing low nicotine tobacco crops, Satyanarayana said that India needs to first
conduct extensive research on the full impact of such a move covering the agro-climatic impact, consumer impact, economic impact and social impact.

--IANS

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