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Megha Middha, is working as an Assistant Professor of Law in Mody University of Science and Technology, Lakshmangarh, Sikar (Rajasthan). She has an experience in the teaching of almost 3 years. She has completed her graduation in BBA LL.B (H) from Amity University, Rajasthan (Gold Medalist) and did her post-graduation (LL.M in Business Laws) from NLSIU, Bengaluru. Currently, she is enrolled in a Ph.D. course in the Department of Law at Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur (Rajasthan). She wishes to excel in academics and research and contribute as much as she can to society. Through her interactions with the students, she tries to inculcate a sense of deep thinking power in her students and enlighten and guide them to the fact how they can bring a change to the society

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PROTECTION OF FARMERS RIGHTS, PLANT VARIETIES IN INDIA AND ITS IMPACT WITH REFERENCE TO THE GENETICALLY MODIFIED PLANTS: A LEGAL ANALYSIS

AUTHORED BY - BHAGIRATHI H & KAVYASHREE AP

India, like many countries, follows the sui generis legislation to protect the new plant varieties. In India, The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPVFR) Act, 2001 formally grants rights to farmers. As technology advances in agriculture, genetically modified plants have become prevalent. The status of patentability and the protection of genetically modified plants is currently uncertain in India. This research article delves into the technology of genetically modified plants and the protections given to plants, seed varieties and farmer rights under the PPVFR act by also analysing the impact on them because of the genetically modified plants honing in on the pivotal issue of seed reuse by the farmers. The distinctions between the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act (PPVFR) and the Patent Law, spotlighting their divergent features as the crux of the matter of whether GM plants can be patented is analysed. The interpretation of section 3(j) of the patents act and its questionable inclusion of transgenic plants with contemporary cases are dealt in the article. Drawing parallels with the (EU) Biotech directive and other international norms, this article discerns the position of GM crops and their patentability in the Indian context by underscoring the intricate tapestry of ethical, economic, and environmental *considerations, painting a roadmap for a balanced biotechnological future.*

Keywords

Farmer’s rights, Plant varieties, Genetically Modified Crops, Patentability, Intellectual Property, Biotechnology.

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Introduction

The first nation to recognise the rights of farmers in plant conservation was India. The Indian experience offers crucial lessons in realizing Farmers' Rights, given its noteworthy aspects. These include India's pioneering work in establishing a legal foundation for Farmers' Rights, its substantial contributions to international discussions on this topic, and the complex agricultural landscape within India where the implementation of Farmers' Rights is being actively pursued. Under the TRIPS Agreement, member countries have the discretion to select the legal framework for plant varieties and seeds, with the option to choose either a sui generis law, a patent law, or a combination of both[1]. India has elected to implement a sui generis law, specifically the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act of 2001, to govern this aspect of intellectual property rights. This legislation aligns not only with the 1978 International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) agreement but also includes robust provisions safeguarding the interests of public sector breeding institutions and farmers drawing strong significance from UPOV. Agriculture is an important aspect to India. A rapidly increasing population in India has led to poverty and food shortages. According to the Global Food security and Nutrition Report, 2019 the target to achieve zero hunger by 2030 is difficult at the current pace [2]despite in India where more than 55% of Indian depend on agriculture for their livelihood.[3] India, a rapidly progressing nation grappling with a burgeoning population, must prioritize the adoption of sustainable technologies like genetically modified (GM) crops engineered to endure drought, enhance nutrient utilization (particularly nitrogen), and withstand high temperatures. [4]There exists a widespread global acceptance and consumption of foods derived from GM crops. As per the 2020 report from the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications, GM crops are embraced by 72 countries worldwide, either for human consumption, animal feed, or for commercial cultivation.[5] Despite numerous extensive studies conducted over five decades in Western countries and India, specifically focusing on biosafety, environmental safety, and biodiversity, opponents of GM crop cultivation frequently choose to overlook these findings. In India, The "Guidelines for Research in Transgenic Plants, 1998" serve as a framework and regulatory framework for conducting research involving genetically modified (GM) plants with

[1] The TRIPS Agreement, (Article 27.3(b))
[2] https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/CA5162EN
[3] More than 55% of Indians make a living from farming. Here's how we can double their income | World Economic Forum (weforum.org)
[4] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/genetically-modified-gm-crops-the-need-of-the-hour/
[5] https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-gm-crop-decision-that-cuts-the-mustard/article67312658.ece

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a focus on addressing issues related to biosafety, environmental protection, and risk assessment. The adoption of GM crops and the approval of it has been increasing in the recent times and may increase further in the coming years. The growing adoption of GM crops by breeders and farmers could potentially pose certain drawbacks that may impact farmers' rights under the PPVFR Act. The lack of clarity regarding the plant protection status of GM crops might open avenues for misuse by corporations and private breeders, thereby potentially encroaching upon farmers' rights. This research article goes deeper into examining the patent eligibility of GM crops and how it influences the rights of farmers in India. It also explores whether this eligibility could be integrated within the framework of the PPVFR Act, and it delves into the significant distinctions between these legislations thereby also analyzing the perspectives of international treaties and conventions.

The Technology behind the creation of genetically modified plants

A transgenic plant is considered a genetically modified organism (GMO), signifying that genes from either an unrelated plant or a microorganism have been deliberately introduced into a plant of interest through artificial means, typically utilizing recombinant DNA (rDNA) technology. Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) developed through recombinant DNA technology distinguish themselves from traditional breeding techniques by avoiding the wholesale blending of genomes between different plant species. Instead, GMOs meticulously and selectively transfer specific DNA segments from one organism, which contains sought-after genetic material capable of bestowing desired traits, to the recipient organism using sophisticated tissue culture methods. To create a transgenic crop, there are five key steps: DNA extraction, gene cloning, designing the gene for plant use, transformation, and plant breeding. Understanding DNA is crucial because it stores genetic information and contains genes that encode specific proteins. Genes have three parts: a promoter region (to start gene expression), a termination sequence (to end it), and the coding region (the gene itself). Genes produce proteins that influence an organism's traits.[6]

Transgenics involves inserting genes from one organism into another, but we need to identify and sequence the specific genes responsible for desired traits like yield or pest resistance. Once identified, we clone these genes using bacterial plasmids, creating many identical copies. Next,

[6] Jamiepighin. (2003). Transgenic crops: How genetics is providing new ways to envision agriculture. The Science Creative Quarterly. 08.20.2006, Textbook, http://www.scq.ubc.ca/ transgenic-crops-how-genetics-is-providing-new-ways-to-envision-agriculture/

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we introduce the cloned gene into the target plant's nucleus. Two common methods are the "Gene Gun," which shoots DNA-coated micro-particles into cells, and the Agrobacterium method, using a bacteria that naturally transfers its DNA to plant cells. In simpler terms, to make genetically modified crops, we first find and copy the genes we want. Then, we shoot these genes into plant cells using a "Gene Gun" or use a bacteria called Agrobacterium to deliver them. This helps us create crops with specific desirable traits.

Protection of plant varieties and farmers rights under the PVPFR Act

Plant variety protection

A "variety" under The PPVFR Act, 2001 is defined as a subgroup within a broader category of plants that can be distinguished by factors such as their growth, yield, appearance, fruit, seeds, or other defining characteristics[7]. The PPVFR Act, 2001 also defines essentially derived varieties, extant variety and a farmer's variety. For the protection of plant varieties, section 13 of the PPVFR ACT, 2001 establishes the "National Register of Plant Varieties," recording registered plant varieties, breeders' information, rights, variety names, reproductive details, and key characteristics. An authority, supervised by the Central Government, will manage this Register and the Copies will be maintained at branch offices as per Central Government directives published in the Official Gazette. Section 15 outlines the key criteria for registering new plant varieties which are novelty, distinctiveness, uniformity, and stability. Existing varieties can be registered if they meet distinctiveness, uniformity, and stability criteria specified in regulations. Variety names must identify without misleading, be non-offensive, and not prohibited. Geographical names are allowed if deemed honest by the registrar. These criteria ensure unique and consistent registered plant varieties.

Farmer's rights protection:

Chapter VI of the Act deals with the farmer's rights. [8]If a farmer develops a new plant variety, they have the same rights for registration and protection as a breeder under this Act. Farmers involved in conserving and improving genetic resources of certain plants can receive recognition

[7] THE PROTECTION OF PLANT VARIETIES AND FARMERS' RIGHTS ACT, 2001, § 2, Gazette of India Extraordinary, Part II, sec. 3(ii) (19th October, 2006)
[8] Ibid.

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and rewards from the Gene Fund, but only if the material they've preserved has been used in registered varieties under this Act. Farmers can also continue to save, use, replant, share, or sell their farm produce, including seeds of protected varieties, just as they did before this Act came into effect. The farmers cannot sell branded seeds of protected varieties. The major aspect of ambiguity of reselling GM crops affects the farmers rights under this act. Certainly, here are the key points summarized. Similarly, a farmer who unknowingly infringes on a right established under this Act will not be considered in violation of that right. When an essentially derived variety is created from a farmers' variety, the breeder of that farmers' variety cannot authorize it without the consent of the farmers or farmer communities who contributed to the preservation or development of the variety. Another major right is exemption from Fees. Farmers, farmer groups, or village communities are not required to pay any fees in proceedings before the Authority, Registrar, Tribunal, or High Court related to this Act or its rules.

Patentability of GM crops in India

Section 3 of the Patents Act outlines what cannot be considered as inventions and, therefore, are excluded from patentability. Under Section 3(h), methods related to agriculture or horticulture are not considered inventions and cannot be patented[9].

Previously, Section 3(i) included plants, but in a 2002 amendment, the term 'or plants' was removed. As a result, the treatment of plants to make them disease-free or increase their economic value is no longer excluded under Section 3(i) or any other exclusions listed in Section 3 of the Patents Act. Further, Section 3(c) of the Patents Act specifically excludes the patentability of "discoveries" related to naturally occurring living organisms or inanimate substances.[10]

Section 3(j) of the Patents Act excludes plants and animals, whether in their entirety or any portion thereof, from being considered inventions and thus, ineligible for patent protection. This exclusion encompasses seeds, various plant and animal types, and even encompasses essentially biological methods for producing or propagating plants and animals.[11]

[9] The Patents Act, 1970, § 3 (http://www.ipindia.gov.in)
[10] Ibid.
[11] Section 3(j) of the Patents Act reads as: "3. What are not inventions.—The following are not inventions within the meaning of this Act,—….(j) plants and animals in whole or any part thereof other than micro organisms but including seeds, varieties and species and essentially biological processes for production or propagation of plants and animals;….."

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Varying Interpretations Regarding the Scope of "Any Part of a Plant" in Section 3(j) of the Patents Act:

Currently, the Indian Patent Office does not permit claims that encompass eukaryotic cells containing both plant and animal cells due to objections raised under Section 3(j) of the Patents Act. The Indian Patent Office categorizes cells, even those produced through transgenic methods for recombinant plant cells, as a component of a plant.[12] Intriguingly, in the case of *Monsanto Technology LLC v. Controller General of Patents*, The central question revolved around whether the inserted Non-Native Nucleic Acid Sequence (NAS) becomes integrated as a component of the plant or seed. If the answer was yes, it would fall within the jurisdiction of the Plant Variety Protection (PPV) Act. Conversely, if the answer was no, it would be governed by the Patents Act. The Controller of Patents rejected Monsanto's patent application for a method titled "Creating a transgenic plant with enhanced heat tolerance," citing non-patentable subject matter under Section 3(j) of the Patents Act. Monsanto contested this decision before the Intellectual Property Appellate Board (IPAB). The IPAB agreed with Monsanto's argument that because the creation of the transgenic variety involved significant human intervention, it could not be classified as an "essentially biological process" and, therefore, was not subject to Section 3(j) of the Patents Act and the single bench of Delhi High Court had held the same.

In a ruling delivered by a single judge of the Delhi High Court, the judgment favored the reinstatement of a license that had been terminated by Monsanto. The defendant's arguments regarding the validity of the patent were rejected. It was decreed that all companies, including Nuziveedu, which had subscribed, should be permitted to utilize the patented technology until the lawsuit was resolved. The royalty fees were to be paid in accordance with the rates set by the state government.

In a contrasting interpretation of Section 3(j) of the Patents Act, the Division Bench of the Delhi High Court, in the case of *Nuziveedu v. Monsanto* [13]on April 11, 2018, invalidated Monsanto's patent number 214436. They concluded that the patent's subject matter was not eligible for patent protection under Section 3(j) of the Patents Act. However, it's noteworthy that the judgment did

[12] Malathi Lakshmikumaran, *Genetically Modified Plants: The IP and Regulatory Concerns in India*, , Innovation, Economic Development, and Intellectual Property in India and China(e book) , pg 368, ISBN 978-981-13-8102-7.
[13] Monsanto Technology LLC and Ors. vs. Nuziveedu Seeds Ltd. and Ors. (08.01.2019 SC) (MANU/SC/0027/2019)

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not address whether DNA should be considered a component of a plant or not. Furthermore, the interpretation and application of Section 3(j) of the Patents Act in this context remain unclear, particularly in cases involving otherwise patentable elements like modified DNA molecules used to create DNA constructs for plant transformation.

Upon the appeal of the case in the Supreme Court of India, the bench emphasized the obligatory consideration of Section 64 of the Patents Act, 1970, and Section 9 of the CPC, 1908, prior to the revocation of a patent. Consequently, the earlier decision made by the single judge bench was affirmed and upheld.

The interpretation of Section 3(j) should exclude transgenic crops for several compelling reasons:

i) GM Crops don't fit the definition of an "essentially biological process" because they involve a combination of both biological and non-biological elements. Creating genetically modified (GM) crops entails a biological aspect where specific genes are extracted from one organism and incorporated into the DNA of another, like a plant, to achieve desired traits. This part of the process is biological since it deals with genetic material and living organisms.

ii) The process of transformation, which entails inserting synthetic DNA constructs into plants using techniques like Agrobacterium tumefaciens or microprojectile bombardment, is fundamentally different from traditional breeding methods. It's a microbiological process rather than an essentially biological one. The Delhi High Court overlooked this distinction, focusing on conventional breeding techniques for trait introgression rather than the patented transformation process. Transformation is a laboratory-based, human-developed method, in contrast to field-based conventional methods like hybridization or introgression, which involve crossbreeding and self-pollination. Consequently, transformation should not be considered within the scope of Section 3(j) of the Patents Act.

iii) The crucial point to emphasize is that the initial transformation process, despite terminological similarities with terms like hybridization, should not be categorized as an "essentially biological process" for plant production. Thus, it should not be subject to Section 3(j) of the Patents Act. The confusion arises from the use of terms like

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"transformation" and "hybridization," but it's essential to differentiate them and highlight that the initial transformation process is a distinct patentable subject matter in India. This distinction sets it apart from what is regarded as an "essentially biological process" for plant production.

If GM crops become patentable, it could potentially resolve the ambiguity surrounding their intellectual property rights. However, this also raises questions about the rights of farmers and how they may conflict with the Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PVPFR) Act. What is urgently required is a well-coordinated effort to strike a balance between the rights of farmers and clear guidelines for patenting GM crops under the Patents Act.

Farmer's rights and the clash between PVPFR Act and Patents Act

The Plant Variety Protection and Farmers' Rights (PVPFR) Act and the Patent Act are two distinct pieces of legislation that play a crucial role in the realm of intellectual property rights, particularly as they pertain to agriculture. While both acts involve the protection of certain plant-related innovations, they differ significantly in their scope, purpose, and implications for farmers' rights.

The PVPFR Act

The Plant Variety Protection and Farmers' Rights (PVPFR) Act is Indian legislation established in 2001. Its primary purpose is to protect new plant varieties while recognizing and safeguarding the rights of farmers. [14]Breeders can obtain exclusive rights to commercialize their plant varieties, but farmers retain essential rights to save, exchange, and use seeds for their crops. This act strikes a balance between encouraging innovation in plant breeding and preserving traditional farming practices, promoting agricultural biodiversity and farmers' well-being. It's a critical piece of legislation that addresses the intersection of intellectual property rights and agriculture in India.

The Patent Act, 1970

The Patent Act is a legal framework governing intellectual property in many countries, including the United States. It grants inventors exclusive rights to their inventions, preventing others from making, using, or selling the patented invention for a set period, typically 20 years. In exchange for this monopoly, inventors must disclose their inventions to the public. The Act encourages

[14] https://www.jstor.org/stable/24108733

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innovation by providing inventors with the opportunity to profit from their creations and ensures that society benefits from technological advancements. It plays a pivotal role in fostering innovation, protecting inventors' rights, and promoting progress across various industries.

The Clash: PVPFR vs. Patent Act

As the years have gone by, conflicts have arisen between the PVPFR Act and the Patent Act, particularly concerning genetically modified crops. The clash between these two pieces of legislation has raised questions about the extent to which farmers can exercise their rights and the power dynamics within the agricultural sector. In one instance, a corporation developed a genetically modified rice variety that promised enhanced nutritional content and yield. They obtained a patent for this invention under the Patent Act, giving them exclusive rights to market and sell the seeds. However, traditional rice farmers in India, who had been cultivating their indigenous rice varieties for generations, were alarmed.[15] Under the PVPFR Act, farmers have the right to continue using their traditional varieties and even share them with others in their community. **However, the introduction of the patented genetically modified rice created a dilemma.** Farmers who chose to grow the new variety found themselves subject to the corporation's terms, including restrictions on saving and replanting seeds. This posed a direct challenge to the farmers' traditional practices and autonomy. The clash between the two acts reached a tipping point when the corporation sued several farmers for patent infringement, alleging that they had saved and replanted seeds from the genetically modified rice without authorisation. This legal battle exposed the tension between the PVPFR Act's recognition of farmers' rights and the Patent Act's grant of exclusive rights to inventors. Farmers, along with advocacy groups and civil society organisations, rallied to defend their rights under the PVPFR Act. They argued that while patents are essential for incentivising innovation, they should not come at the expense of traditional farming practices and the well-being of rural communities. The case garnered widespread attention, sparking a national and international debate on the intersection of intellectual property rights, agriculture, and farmers' rights.

The Impact on Farmers' Rights

The clash between the PVPFR Act and the Patent Act has significant implications for farmers' rights. On one hand, the PVPFR Act recognises and protects the rights of traditional farmers to

[15] https://nopr.niscpr.res.in/bitstream/123456789/251/1/JIPR%2012%283%29%20%282007%29%20341-348.pdf

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save, use, and exchange seeds of protected varieties. This provision safeguards their centuries-old agricultural practices and ensures food security in rural communities. However, when genetically modified crops patented under the Patent Act enter the picture, farmers' rights can be curtailed. The exclusive rights granted to patent holders can limit farmers' autonomy over their seeds and force them into contractual agreements with corporations. This often results in a loss of control over farming practices and dependence on external entities for seeds and technologies. The clash also highlights the potential for corporations to misuse patent rights. While patents are intended to reward innovation, they can sometimes be leveraged to create monopolies and control access to essential agricultural resources. [16]In the case of genetically modified crops, the patent holder may dictate the terms of seed purchase, pricing, and usage, which can be detrimental to small-scale farmers. Farmers' rights, as enshrined in the PVPFR Act, are essential for maintaining agricultural biodiversity and ensuring food security. These rights enable farmers to continue their age-old practices of seed saving, exchange, and adaptation to local conditions. They also promote the conservation of traditional crop varieties, which are often better suited to specific ecosystems and climates. However, it's crucial to strike a balance between farmers' rights and the need to incentivise innovation in agriculture. While the PVPFR Act safeguards farmers' interests, the Patent Act encourages research and development by granting exclusive rights to inventors. The challenge lies in harmonising these two legislative frameworks to ensure that innovation benefits farmers and society as a whole without compromising traditional agricultural practices.

Toward a Resolution: Balancing Innovation and Farmers' Rights

In the wake of the legal battle and the public outcry, efforts were made to find a middle ground between the PVPFR Act and the Patent Act. Stakeholders from the government, agricultural industry, and civil society engaged in extensive dialogues to address the concerns raised by traditional farmers while acknowledging the importance of incentivising innovation. One approach was to promote the coexistence of traditional and genetically modified crops. Under this model, farmers who wish to continue cultivating traditional varieties are protected by the PVPFR Act, while those who choose to adopt genetically modified crops can do so under specific guidelines that balance their rights with patent holders' interests. This approach seeks to ensure that farmers are not unduly restricted in their agricultural practices while also allowing for technological advancement. Additionally, there were calls for increased transparency and fair

[16] https://nopr.niscpr.res.in/bitstream/123456789/11571/1/JIPR%2016%282%29%20131-138.pdf

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licensing practices within the agricultural industry. Advocates argued that patent holders should make their genetically modified seeds available to farmers at reasonable prices, allowing them to access these innovations without facing exorbitant costs. To facilitate the coexistence of these two legislative frameworks, mechanisms for resolving disputes between farmers and patent holders were proposed. These mechanisms aim to protect farmers from unwarranted legal action while ensuring that patent holders can enforce their rights when necessary.

The clash between the PVPFR Act and the Patent Act underscores the complex and evolving relationship between intellectual property rights, agriculture, and farmers' rights. Balancing the need to incentivise innovation with the preservation of traditional farming practices is a formidable challenge that requires ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and thoughtful policymaking. While the PVPFR Act and the Patent Act serve distinct purposes, they both have a profound impact on farmers' lives and livelihoods. The recognition of farmers' rights under the PVPFR Act is a critical step toward safeguarding traditional agriculture and conserving genetic resources. Simultaneously, the Patent Act plays a crucial role in driving innovation and technological advancement in agriculture. As we navigate this intricate terrain, it is essential to prioritise the interests of small-scale farmers and traditional farming communities. Farmers should have the autonomy to choose the crops they cultivate and the seeds they use, whether they opt for traditional varieties or genetically modified ones. At the same time, patent holders must act responsibly, ensuring that their innovations benefit society as a whole and do not create undue hardships for farmers. Ultimately, the clash between these two acts serves as a reminder that the intersection of laws and agriculture requires constant vigilance and adaptation. It calls for a commitment to finding solutions that promote both innovation and the protection of farmers' rights, thereby ensuring a sustainable and equitable future for agriculture.

International norms as to GM Crops

Genetically modified (GM) crops and food has been a topic of international debate and regulation for decades. The Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement, established by the World Trade Organization (WTO), lays down certain international norms that affect the regulation of GM crops and their trade. [17]In this discussion, we will explore the EU Biotech Directive, various countries' laws concerning GM plants, and conclude with suggestions

[17] https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/jcb.2010.24

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for future directions.

TRIPS and International Norms

The Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, better known as TRIPS, stands as a pivotal international agreement forged under the banner of the World Trade Organization (WTO). It represents a concerted effort by the global community to create a unified framework for the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights, a domain that encompasses patents, copyrights, trademarks, and trade secrets. At its core, TRIPS laid out a set of minimum standards, essentially a floor beneath which no WTO member could fall when it came to protecting and enforcing intellectual property rights. [18]The scope of TRIPS encompassed various facets of intellectual property, but its most far-reaching impact was undoubtedly in the field of patents. **TRIPS introduced the concept of "national treatment," mandating that WTO member countries treat foreign intellectual property rights holders with the same degree of protection as they accord to their own citizens or entities. Additionally, it established the principle of "most-favored-nation" (MFN) treatment, requiring that all WTO member countries grant equal treatment to intellectual property rights holders from other member nations**. Beyond setting these fundamental principles, TRIPS delved into the practical aspects of enforcing intellectual property rights. It outlined measures and procedures, both civil and criminal, that countries were obligated to put in place to ensure adequate enforcement. These measures included everything from judicial processes to border enforcement mechanisms and remedies for infringements. While TRIPS itself does not specifically address genetically modified (GM) crops, its influence on the regulation of such crops is substantial. GM crops often incorporate patented technologies, and the protection of these innovations is crucial for the continued development and commercialisation of GM crops. Through TRIPS, countries are prompted to create a legal framework that upholds intellectual property rights. Biotechnology companies, invested heavily in research and development, rely on these protections to safeguard their GM crop innovations, which often involve novel genetic modifications and associated technologies. Consequently, TRIPS fosters an environment in which the investments in GM crop research are shielded, enabling further advancements in agriculture. TRIPS stands as a cornerstone of international norms governing intellectual property rights. While it directly addresses a broad spectrum of intellectual property matters, its indirect influence on the regulation

[18] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1046/j.0960-7412.2002.001607.x

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and protection of genetically modified crops cannot be overstated. TRIPS has ushered in a new era where intellectual property rights are at the forefront of international trade, shaping the landscape for innovation, commerce, and the continued development of cutting-edge technologies like GM crops.

EU Biotech Directive

The European Union (EU) Biotech Directive is a pivotal piece of legislation that has profoundly influenced the regulation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and genetically modified (GM) crops within the EU. This directive, formally known as Directive 2001/18/EC, was adopted in 2001 and represents the EU's comprehensive response to the challenges posed by the advent of biotechnology in agriculture and environmental management. At its core, the EU Biotech Directive was designed to establish a stringent regulatory framework for the release and marketing of GMOs in the European Union. [19]Its primary focus was on GM organisms, including GM crops, which were becoming increasingly prevalent in the global agricultural landscape. One of the central tenets of the Biotech Directive is its insistence on thorough risk assessments before any GM organisms or products can be approved for release into the environment. These risk assessments are scientifically rigorous, evaluating the potential environmental and human health risks posed by GMOs. Furthermore, the directive places a strong emphasis on the precautionary principle, which means that, in cases of scientific uncertainty, decisions should err on the side of caution and prioritise environmental and public safety. The directive also introduced stringent labelling and traceability requirements. Any product, including food and feed, containing more than 0.9% of GM ingredients must be labeled as such. This transparency in labelling ensures that consumers are aware of the presence of GM components in the products they purchase.

Key aspects of the EU Biotech Directive include:

1. Environmental Risk Assessments: Before a GM crop can be approved, it must undergo a comprehensive environmental risk assessment. This includes evaluating potential impacts on non-target organisms, soil, and ecosystems.
2. Monitoring and Reporting: The directive requires continuous monitoring of GM crops after their release to detect any unexpected environmental effects. If such effects are observed, remedial action can be taken.
3. Public Consultation: The directive emphasises the importance of involving the public in

[19] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-0386.1996.tb00018.x

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decision-making processes related to GM crops. Public consultations are conducted to gather input and address concerns.

4. Safeguard Measures: If new scientific information emerges indicating potential risks from a GM crop, the EU has the authority to suspend or withdraw approvals.
5. Coordination with Other Legislation: The Biotech Directive is part of a larger framework that includes regulations on the deliberate release of GMOs into the environment, the marketing of GM food and feed, and traceability and labelling.

The EU Biotech Directive reflects the EU's cautious approach to GM crops and their potential impacts on the environment and human health. It has resulted in a relatively slow and risk-averse approval process for GM crops within the EU. As a consequence, the cultivation of GM crops is less common in EU member states compared to other parts of the world.

GM Crop Regulations in Other Countries

Genetically modified (GM) crop regulations vary significantly from one country to another, reflecting diverse perspectives on agricultural biotechnology, food safety, and environmental protection. Here, we delve into the GM crop regulations in several countries, highlighting their approaches and key features.[2021]

1. **United States:** The United States has long been a proponent of GM crops and has one of the most permissive regulatory frameworks. GM crops undergo a rigorous safety assessment by three federal agencies: the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). [22]These assessments primarily focus on environmental impacts, pesticide use, and food safety, respectively. While the U.S. emphasises science-based evaluations, critics argue that the regulatory system priorities commercial interests over public health and environmental concerns. Moreover, labelling of GM foods is not mandatory, although many products do carry voluntary labels.

2. **China:** China is a major player in GM crop production and has established its regulatory framework. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) oversees GM crop

[20] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1046/j.0960-7412.2003.01602.x
[21] https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpls.2021.630396
[22]

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approvals and conducts safety assessments. China has embraced GM crops to increase agricultural productivity and has developed its GM varieties, such as insect-resistant cotton and herbicide-tolerant soybeans. However, China also faces challenges related to unauthorised GM crops and ensuring adherence to regulations.

3. **Brazil:** Brazil has become a significant producer of GM crops, particularly soybeans and maize. Its regulatory body, the National Biosafety Technical Commission (CTNBio), conducts safety assessments before commercialisation. Brazil's embrace of GM crops has driven agricultural growth but has also raised concerns about deforestation and pesticide use. The country's regulatory framework focuses on safety and technology adoption to enhance agricultural productivity.

Conclusion

It's worth noting that biotechnology companies are typically the ones with the resources and expertise to develop GM crops in laboratories, while small agricultural companies and individual farmers lack such capabilities. Therefore, finding a solution that protects the interests of both parties and creates a win-win scenario is of utmost importance at this juncture.