

# A better way of life for India's farmers

With Bt cotton, thousands of growers in India have been earning higher income, transcending subsistence farming



**Gurtej Singh** couldn't afford life's comforts until he switched to growing Bt cotton a few years ago. Singh, a young farmer in his early 30s, grows cotton on the 6.5 hectares he owns in Gharangna, located in the Bhatinda district of Punjab.

With yields having more than doubled to 3,200 kg per hectare, thanks to bollworm-resistant Bt cotton, Singh has made enough money to build a new *pucca*, or brick house for his family comprising his parents, wife and young son. Brick houses are sought after in India, as they are stable and a symbol of prosperity in the villages. For the majority who cannot afford a home, a *kaccha* house, or one made of mud, is the next best alternative. Having transcended subsistence farming, Singh has bought extra land, a car and invested in an education policy for his only son.



**Gautam Javade**, 50, is a farmer who embraces technology. Keen to provide a better life for his family, the farmer from India's Wardha district in Maharashtra has switched from cultivating conventional cotton seeds to Bt cotton on the 10 hectares he owns. With yields having more than doubled in the last few years, the father of two has saved enough to buy a laptop worth US\$1,100 for his son, send his children to school and build a comfortable *pucca* home for his family. There is even enough money for him to install drip irrigation on three hectares of his land and hire farm hands.

"Bt cotton has changed my life," Javade says. "Because of better harvests, I am able to fulfill my dreams of building my own brick home, leasing land, and providing a more comfortable life for my family."

# What's next ?

- India is the world's fourth-largest grower of biotech crops after the United States, Argentina and Brazil.
- Indian farmers grew a total of 7.6 million hectares of Bt cotton in the country in 2008.
- Farmers have been growing Bt cotton in India since 2002. Between 2002 and 2008, Bt cotton has helped millions of farmers in the country save an estimated US\$2.06 million on insecticide as the crop is resistant to bollworms.
- In July 2009, the Government of India said it plans to introduce biotech vegetables such as tomato, eggplant and cauliflower in India in the next three years. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and Department of Biotechnology have approved the three crops, which are in various stages of tests in development in institutes across the country, according to news reports.



**Dyneshwar Buibhand**, 30, is a Bt cotton farmer and father of two, in the Yavatmal district of Maharashtra. He owns 5.7 hectares of land. He says, "After switching to Bt cotton, I have seen my productivity more than doubled, compared with using conventional seeds. Because Bt cotton is bollworm-resistant, I save about US\$382 per hectare on pesticides. My livelihood has improved."

"Today, I'm able to build a *pucca* home for my family and send my son to an English-medium convent school," he adds.



**Nandkishore Raut** from Bhambraja village, Yavatmal, Maharashtra, 38, has two young sons and a 14-hectare farm. Besides farming, he counsels fellow farmers on seed selection, providing guidance on how to enjoy higher yields.

He feels prides in his purchase of 5 hectares of land, his new *pucca* home, and life insurance policy of US\$3,570 for his three-year-old son. This has been possible because of bigger yields of 4,800 kg per hectare with Bt cotton, compared with 1,400 kg per hectare in 2001 with conventional seeds. These days, Raut earns US\$1,008 per hectare on average and is able to provide adequately for his family.

Source: Mahyco-Monsanto Biotech (MMB) India

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