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AP Govt warned over sops to maize farming

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Pioneer News Service | Hyderabad

Millet Network of India, an organisation fighting to save and promote the cultivation of millet crops in the country, has questioned the motives of the Andhra Pradesh Government in increasing the input subsidy for the maize crop from Rs 3,500 to Rs 5,000 per acre.

PV Sateesh, the national convener of Millet Network, alleged that there was a sinister game plan involving the Government and a seed manufacturing multinational company behind promoting the maize crop at the cost of other food crops, endangering the food security of the people.

Addressing a Press conference in Hyderabad on Wednesday, he said that unlike other millets such as jawar and bajra (pearl millet), maize was an industrial crop and it was posing threat to the other more nutritious food millets.

He alleged that Andhra Pradesh was the next State to be drawn in the trap of Monsanto, after the other States like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. The propagation of the maize crop is a step towards introducing the genetically modified variety of the maize in India, he warned.

Demanding the Andhra Pradesh Government to rethink its policy on maize and not to encourage the further spread of its cultivation, he pointed out that it was already a fastest growing crop in the country. "There was no demand to increase its subsidy. Why it was increased when the subsidy for the crops like paddy and sugar was not increased despite farmers demanding and agitating for it. This is what raises the doubts and questions about the motive behind it," he said.

Sateesh pointed out that between 2000 and 2010 the maize cultivation area in Andhra Pradesh has gone up from 4.52 lakh hectares to 8.56 lakh hectares and its production had gone up by four times from 14.72 lakh tonnes to 42.20 lakh tonnes.

Of the total maize production in India, only 35 per cent goes towards human consumption and the remaining goes to feed industry, cereal industry, bio fuel and alcohol manufacturing.

He said the use of maize to produce bio fuel will only boost the automobile industry and it will be a very poor land use when hunger and malnutrition continues to be a big problem in the country.

Warning that the maize was facing a serious threat to the other millets, which were source of nutrition for the poor, PV Sateesh said that it will create serious threat to food security in the country. "Maize cannot withstand the climate change but other millets can and they can be grown in the most adverse conditions," he said.

Millet Network of India demanded the Andhra Pradesh Government to increase the input subsidy for the other millets to Rs 10,000 per hectare to promote their production.

Interestingly, the demand for the Indian maize seems to be on the rise in the international market as the prices for the commodity have shot up in the international market after the fall in the maize production in the United States, the biggest grower in the world.

The maize or corn production in India is estimated to be 20.23 tonnes this year as the area under maize cultivation has gone up to 7.6 million hectares.

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