

Govt. allows GM soy meal import to support poultry industry

Environmental activists have raised concerns

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There was some relief for the beleaguered poultry industry this week with the Union government deciding to allow the import of crushed genetically modified (GM) soybean, which is a major ingredient of poultry feed. However, environmental activists have raised concerns about the permission given for something derived from a genetically modified plant to enter the human food



The poultry industry has been lobbying for the import of soy meal.

chain, given that India's regulatory system has yet to approve GM foods.

The poultry industry has been crushed by multiple disasters over the last year

and a half. In January 2020, a false rumour that COVID-19 could be spread by eating chicken meat led to a crash in demand. If the losses in both the broiler and layer sectors are included – that is, both meat and eggs – it amounted to ₹28,000 crore, according to All India Poultry Breeders Association chairman Bahadur Ali. A year later, avian flu cases led to another crash, followed by a crippling rise in the prices of poultry feed.

“Poultry feed makes up 65% of the cost of production for the farmer. Soy meal [which is left over after oil is extracted from the bean] is

the main protein ingredient in the feed, especially for broilers. Over the last three to four years, soy meal has been available at an average cost of ₹34 to 36/kg. This month, it shot up to ₹96/kg,” said Mr. Ali.

The poultry industry has been lobbying for the import of soy meal to tide over domestic shortages and tame prices, but have been stymied by the grey area of regulation regarding genetically modified ingredients.

On August 10, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD) notified the Customs Department that soy meal and oil

cake from GM soy would be permitted for import. In a letter to the poultry breeders, the DAHD cited the Environment Ministry, saying it had no objection “since soya de-oiled and crushed cake did not contain any living organism”.

The Coalition for a GM-Free India, which includes consumer rights groups and sustainable farming groups, termed the decision “highly objectionable and legally untenable”. It noted that the 1989 rules of the Environment Protection Act applied not just to GM organisms, but also products and substances thereof.