

Govt pulls nod for 11 biostimulants over 'religious, dietary' concerns


List has animal protein-based growth stimulants used in cultivation of paddy, tomato, potato, cucumber, chilli.

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Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan (File Photo)

Months after clearing them for crops, such as paddy, tomato, potato, cucumber and chilli, the Union Agriculture Ministry has withdrawn approval for the sale of 11 **biostimulants** derived from animal sources — from chicken feathers and pig tissue to bovine hide and cod scales — due to “religious and dietary restrictions”, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Officials told this newspaper that the decision followed complaints made to Union Agriculture Minister [Shivraj Singh Chouhan](#)'s office by "individuals" from the Hindu and Jain communities.

A biostimulant is a substance or microorganism, or a combination of both, that stimulates plant processes to improve nutrient uptake, growth, yield, quality and stress tolerance. Unlike fertilisers, it does not supply nutrients directly, and unlike pesticides, it does not control pests.

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According to Fortune Business Insights, the Indian biostimulants market was valued at US\$ 355.53 million in 2024 and projected to grow to US\$ 1,135.96 million by 2032. Industry sources listed Coromandel International, Syngenta and Godrej Agrovet among the major producers of biostimulants in the country. Biostimulants are usually sold across the counter in liquid form and sprayed on crops.

The Centre's decision is directed at one of the most common types of biostimulants: protein hydrolysate, which is a mixture of amino acids and peptides formed by breaking down proteins. These can be derived from plants, such as soy or maize, or from animal sources like feathers, hides or tissue.

In a notification issued on September 30, the Ministry "omitted" the 11 biostimulants made from protein hydrolysates. They comprise different doses used for green gram, tomato, chilli, cotton, cucumber, hot pepper, soybean, grapes and paddy. The animal sources they rely on include bovine hide, hair and tanned skin; chicken feathers; pig tissue; skin, bones and scales of cod; and, a variety of sardine.

EXPLAINED

Laying down the law

Biostimulants are separate from fertilisers and are used, mainly as a spray, to enhance crop yield, quality and growth. The ministry's move is part of its efforts to bring the opaque sector, and its products, under a regulatory framework.

These biostimulants were added to Schedule VI of the Fertiliser (Inorganic, Organic or Mixed) (Control) Order (FCO), 1985, through separate notifications earlier this year after the Indian

Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) cleared them.

When contacted, ICAR Director-General Mangi Lal Jat said permission for these animal source-based biostimulants had been “withheld”.

“No new category of biostimulants, which were not already in the market, were recommended for marketing. However, to avoid ethical issues and conflict with religious and dietary restrictions, biostimulants having protein hydrolysates derived from animal sources notified in the FCO were withheld till proper pre-harvest interval data (time between spraying and harvesting) is generated when the biostimulant is used as foliar spray (direct application on leaves),” Jat said.

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Before 2021, biostimulants were sold freely in India for more than a decade with no specific rules governing their sale, safety and efficacy. In 2021, the Government brought them under the FCO, which meant companies had to register products and prove safety and effectiveness. But they were still allowed to keep selling until June 16, 2025, provided they submitted applications for approval.

Union Minister Chouhan has repeatedly flagged the proliferation of unregulated biostimulants. “Around 30,000 biostimulant products were being sold unchecked for several years, and even in the last four years, around 8,000 products remained in circulation. After I enforced stricter checks, the number has now come down to approximately 650,” he had said in July.

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