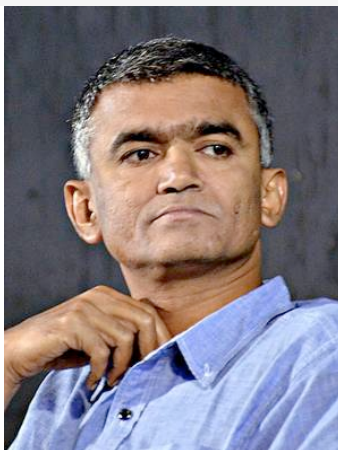


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Karnataka to release drought-tolerant varieties of five crops by next year



The crop varieties have been developed through non-transgenic biotechnology to tackle the impact of climate change

Karnataka's efforts to use non-transgenic biotechnology to tackle the impact of climate change has just begun to yield results, with the State set to release drought-tolerant and improved varieties of five crops, including ragi, by next year.

Disclosing this while delivering a plenary lecture at the Indian Agricultural Science Congress, which is deliberating on 'climate-smart agriculture' here on Friday, Karnataka Agriculture Minister Krishna Byre Gowda said the field trials of some of the new crops had begun, while those of the remaining would be taken up later this year.

He told *The Hindu* that it was for the first time in the country that a State had taken up such a non-transgenic biotechnology initiative to tackle drought through genome sequencing that involves identifying the gene which is responsible for increasing drought tolerance.

Improved variety

The work on developing drought-tolerant varieties has been taken up with ragi, groundnut, sorghum, pigeon pea, and Bengal gram. Each of

these five crops would have an improved variety by next year. The field trials had showed that the yield of the new varieties would be about 25% more when compared with the regular varieties, he said.

Scientists involved in the project were able to develop these varieties in three years as against the normal time requirement of six to seven years, the Minister said. He stressed the need to popularise nutrient-rich millets by introducing contemporary recipes.

He described the State's flagship scheme of Krishi Bhagya, which involves building a farm pond to provide protecting doses of irrigation to crops only during parts of summer months, as a prominent effort to tackle the impact of climate change.

The State was in the process of increasing the number of farm ponds under this scheme from the present one lakh to 1.5 lakh by June, he said.

'Karnataka has more climate change-sensitive cultivable land than Rajasthan'

While it is known that Karnataka has a huge extent of drought-prone land, second only to Rajasthan in the country, Agriculture Minister Krishna Byre Gowda on Friday said Karnataka overtakes Rajasthan to rank first in the country in terms of the quantum of climate change-sensitive land, if only cultivable land is taken into account.

Addressing the Indian Agricultural Science Congress here, he pointed out that not all the land in Rajasthan was cultivable as some of it was desert land. Karnataka had more quantum of cultivable land than Rajasthan, which was susceptible to the impact of climate change or weather variation, he said.

Almost all the land in Karnataka was cultivable, unlike in Rajasthan, he said.