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Pakistan Orders Urgent Review of Controversial GMO Soybean Policy

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The Pakistani government has launched a 90-day scientific review of genetically modified organism (GMO) soybean imports following concerns about biosafety risks and market distortions. Climate Change Minister Dr. Musadik Malik convened an emergency meeting after revelations that locally produced soybean has become more expensive

than imported varieties, raising questions about agricultural competitiveness and food security protocols.

The review committee, led by Professor Kosar Abdullah Malik, will examine why Pakistan's soybean yields lag behind global benchmarks and assess potential gene contamination risks from GMO varieties. This comes after November 2024's controversial decision to permit GMO soybean imports without completing mandatory local risk assessments under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, an international agreement Pakistan ratified. Critics allege the policy shift benefited well-connected importers while bypassing objections from four former prime ministers and the Food Security Ministry.

Agricultural experts warn the rushed approval of 47 untested gene events could jeopardize Pakistan's \$2.3 billion poultry feed industry, which relies heavily on soybean meal. "Science must guide such decisions, not political expediency," argued Dr. Tariq Bucha of the Farmers Association of Pakistan. The ministry has ordered a national conference within ten days to gather stakeholder input, with a comprehensive biotechnology policy expected within three months, a timeline some analysts consider ambitious given the technical complexities involved.

As Pakistan balances food security needs with biosafety concerns, this review represents a critical test of regulatory independence. The outcome will determine whether the country maintains its cautious approach to GMOs or embraces modified crops as a solution to its \$700 million annual soybean import bill. With global debates raging about genetic engineering's long-term impacts, Pakistan's decision could reshape its agricultural trajectory for decades.