



Uproar across Asia over Australia's approval of multinational GM rice.

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The genetically-modified organism (GMO) known as “golden rice” (GR2E rice) will not significantly address hunger or Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) according to the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC).

“The International Conference on Golden Rice” was organised by MASIPAG and the Stop Golden Rice Network in the Philippines and facilitated by the Anti-Poverty Commission. It included delegates and farmers, scientists, and development workers from Bangladesh, Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, India, and the Philippines. The conference participants joined peasant farmers calling for the stopping of the GM rice outside the Department of Agriculture [1].

The conference heard that Australia/New Zealand approval of GR2E rice will impact heavily on indigenous farmers all over Asia. This is because as Filipino law stands, the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) safety assessment can be used for approval to plant in many of the Asian rice growing countries.

FSANZ said that on “the best available scientific evidence” it was safe to eat. Yet, experts and farmers from India, the Philippines and Indonesia provided studies raising concerns over the safety of the rice, proving that not all evidence was sought or considered by FSANZ. FSANZ has approved the rice into the Australasian food chain ‘in case of contamination’ to ‘avoid trade issues’. There is a total absence of evidence for consumers to know if it is safe to eat. FSANZ said feeding/ingestion studies were not provided nor did FSANZ require them [2].

“FSANZ’s rubber stamp approach to food safety is putting the health of billions of people at risk. This GM rice is aimed at pregnant women and children and yet there is an absence of evidence of safety.” Said Fran Murrell from MADGE Australia, “We hope that the Philippine Government regulators protect their people by ensuring that rigorous, long term safety studies are carried out.”

Liza Maza from the National Anti-Poverty Commission in the Philippines said “There was no comparative studies between GR2E rice and other varieties to see if it can lessen Vitamin A deficiency,”

Cris Panerio, national coordinator for the Philippino farmer and scientist alliance (MASIPAG), noted “Golden rice is fraught with inherent problems, one of which is the low yield resulting to the disruption of the native structure of the rice plant.”

Scientist Dr Debal Deb has found numerous traditional varieties of rice contain beta carotene, the pre-cursor of Vitamin A, in the bran. Some also contain lipids needed to process beta-carotene by the body. “We cannot allow billions of funds, public money and attention to be poured to Golden Rice which is nutritionally inferior to diverse, readily accessible and natural sources of beta carotene which should be promoted not Golden Rice” said Dr Deb.

The developer of the GM rice, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), receives support from Syngenta, Dow and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

“GM rice will contaminate GM-free rice, leading to the potential for patent control over these varieties,” said Fran Murrell. “IRRI cannot be sued and so farmers will have no recourse when their rice is contaminated.”

The Conference Declaration states “..the past Green Revolution and current GMO commercialization peddled by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) Monsanto - Bayer, Syngenta (now ChemChina) and other giant agrochemical corporations in the last three decades has not solved but exacerbated the bitter state of rural poverty, hunger and malnutrition in Asia. It has robbed our farmers' of sovereignty over our seeds, poisoned our ecosystems, grabbed our land, chained our farmers to debt and deaths, eroded our genetic diversity and trampled the sanctity of Life.”

“Golden rice is a PR mirage. It is an illusion that a miracle seed will solve the complex social, political and economic problems which cause malnutrition” said Fran Murrell from MADGE Australia.

References

[1] International Conference on Rice.

<https://www.facebook.com/Stop-Golden-Rice-Network-294862020923844/>

[2] <http://www.madge.org.au/gm-golden-rice-bubble-bursts>

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