

## **GM crops are no solution to malnutrition!**

*Groups in Asia support Filipino farmers' uprooting of Golden Rice*

PRESS RELEASE

August 29, 2013

On August 8, 2013 more than 400 farmers, church people, students, academics and consumers uprooted a field trial of genetically modified (GM) rice that was nearly ready for harvest in Pili, Camarines Sur, Philippines. This courageous action undertaken by the Peasant Movement of Bicol and the Sikwal-GMO alliance was necessary to prevent the contamination of Asia's most important food crop by GMOs.

Field trials of Golden Rice, one in Pili and three in other areas of the Philippines, are part of an agenda to push forward the acceptance of GMOs. Golden Rice is being developed by a 'public-private partnership' led by Syngenta, one of the world's largest pesticide and seed corporations and the owner of the patent rights involved, and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). There is also a Golden Rice Network spread out in countries like India, Bangladesh, China, Vietnam and Indonesia.

The GM rice being field tested, known as Golden Rice, is modified with two genes, one from bacteria and one from maize, to produce beta carotene, a source of Vitamin A, in the rice grain. Proponents of Golden Rice say that it could significantly reduce vitamin A deficiency, which can cause severe illness, blindness, and even death. But beta carotene is found abundantly in many plants and fruits that are already cultivated in Asia, such as carrots, pumpkins and sweet potatoes, and there is no need to put farmers and consumers at risk by introducing GMOs when these other sources are available.

This is not the first time that IRRI has tried to introduce a GM rice variety. The institute has been leading efforts to introduce GM rice in Asia for over a decade now. But, in each case, strong public resistance has blocked its efforts. At present, no country in Asia has approved any GM rice variety for human consumption or commercialisation.

IRRI and the other promoters of Golden Rice hope that this variety, advertised as a solution to malnutrition, will break through public opposition to GMOs. In its public responses to the uprooting of the crop, IRRI has emphasised that the trials are part of a public project not a corporate one and has dismissed concerns about the risks involved, saying that the field trials are necessary to test the efficacy of the rice and its agricultural performance.

But IRRI is hardly a public institution. Alongside from the funding it receives from governments, IRRI's work is funded by several private entities that are strongly in support of GMOs, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and transnational agribusiness corporations like Bayer, DuPont and Syngenta. IRRI, which orchestrated the "green revolution" of chemical rice farming in Asia, has moved increasingly into the private sphere in recent years, not only in terms of funding but also through direct partnerships with agribusiness

corporations, such as with Golden Rice, and by seeking intellectual property rights (IPRs) over its research. Its new IPR policy expressly states that it may seek IPRs, such as plant breeders' rights and patents, on all of its "intellectual assets" (germ plasm included) and generate revenues from the "management" of these IPRs. IRRI's gene bank holds approximately 80% of the traditional rice varieties that have been collected from farmers' fields across the globe,

The risks posed by field trials of Golden Rice may not mean much to IRRI, but they are enormous for farmers and consumers in the Philippines and throughout Asia. There is no way to ensure that a GMO field trial does not contaminate neighbouring fields. The recent case of an unapproved GM wheat found growing in a farmer's field in the US or the detection of unapproved GM traits in rice from China show how field trials lead to contamination and serious consequences for farmers, consumer and markets. In this case, IRRI, Syngenta and the other Golden Rice promoters are putting the region's most important cultural, food and agricultural crop at risk with 800 square meter open field tests of a variety not approved for human consumption and in an area home to many traditional varieties cultivated by local farmers.

In this respect, we would like to voice our support for the action undertaken by the Peasant Movement of Bicol and Sikwal-GMO, an alliance of farmers, church people, students, academics and consumers based in Bicol who are struggling against GMOs and agrochemical transnational corporations, to uproot the Golden Rice field trials in Pili, Camarines Sur.

We urge an immediate halt to the other three field trials and the further development of Golden Rice in the Philippines or elsewhere. No one is fooled by concerted efforts of IRRI, Syngenta and national agriculture research institutes to develop Golden Rice as a "poster child" for the GM industry and to get GM foods accepted under the guise of a humanitarian mission. Instead, we call on social movements, farmers' organisations and people's networks across Asia to join us in supporting the rights of the farmers and communities, like those in Bicol, to assert food sovereignty and protect local biodiversity. Local communities have the legitimacy and the right to say no to GE crops like Golden Rice and defend their health, environment, territories and livelihoods.

## **Signed**

[Biothai](#)

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