



STOP GOLDEN RICE! Network

2611 Ilang-ilang St., Carbern Ville, Los Banos, Laguna 4030 Philippines
stopgrnetwork@gmail.com

November 15, 2019

MEDIA STATEMENT

Farmers and Civil Society Organisations Urge Bangladesh Agriculture and Environment Ministers to Stop Golden Rice Commercialization

Support safer, sustainable alternatives to curbing VAD instead

November 15 – Announcement that a final decision on the release of Golden Rice will be made today by Bangladesh Agriculture and Environment Ministers following a recently reported impromptu meeting of the ministries with Nobel Peace Laureate Robert Richards who enquired about the Golden Rice release development during his recent visit to the country. Golden Rice, genetically modified to express beta-carotene, a Vitamin A pre-cursor, is touted to address Vitamin A Deficiency (VAD) among children and mothers in developing countries such as Bangladesh, the Philippines, India and Indonesia. However, even as the Golden Rice is designed to be consumed by these vulnerable sectors, no credible safety tests has ever been conducted to ascertain that Golden Rice is safe to eat and will have no long-term effects among its consumers.

The Stop Golden Rice Network, a coalition of more than 30 organizations across Asia, appeal to the Bangladesh government, particularly the Ministries for Agriculture and Environment to protect and uphold the safety of the people and halt the commercialization of Golden Rice. That the government has not yet released Golden Rice gives the farmers and consumers hope that they are still closely studying its health and environmental safety because we believe that the perceived benefits from the GM rice are gravely outweighed by the risks it poses to human health and crops diversity.

First, the supposed beta-carotene from the Golden Rice is found to be of minimal or even negligible value, that even the US FDA has stated that “the concentration of β -carotene in GR2E rice is too low to warrant a nutrient content claim.” Local and traditional foods that are easily available and affordable have higher amount of beta-carotene, but the erosion of food diversity due in large part to chemical-based farming is seen as one of the leading causes of malnutrition problems.

Second, this already meager amount of beta-carotene degrades fast after harvesting and processing, which includes cooking the rice. Farmers are recommended to vacuum-pack and refrigerate the unmilled paddy rice to save the beta-carotene, a practice that is unheard of in any rice-planting community.

Third, VAD like other malnutrition cases are primarily caused by hunger and poverty. Though Bangladesh is reported to have made significant reduction in its

poverty rates, millions of families still remain below the poverty line without sufficient income that can afford them the basic needs for the family, including a healthy and balanced diet. In a hand-to-mouth existence, nutrition is almost always the least priority of the family.

The SGRN agrees that the health of children and mothers is of paramount importance. VAD has been addressed through a mixture of efforts, including conventional food fortification. As mentioned above, it is also crucial to have a balanced diet that not only includes the leafy greens and fruits, but also meat or fish as source of good fats and oil to better absorb the Vitamin A. By supporting and promoting diversity in farming and in the diets, sustainable agriculture and the protection of farmers' rights to land, seeds and appropriate technologies, hunger and malnutrition can be addressed in a safe and sustainable way.

Golden Rice proponents and its apologists claim that it is a crime to prevent its release. SGRN say that the only crime being committed is turning a blind eye to increasing control of corporations, neoliberalization of food and agriculture, land grabs and climate injustice that are driving millions of peasant families and poor communities into malnutrition and hunger. #