



Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment (SEARICE)

29 July 2021

RISE AGAINST GOLDEN RICE!

SEARICE denounces DA-BPI's approval of Golden Rice commercialization, highlights administrative procedures overlooked, marginal effects to nutrition security.

The Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment (SEARICE) denounces the recent decision of the Department of Agriculture - Bureau of Plant Industry (DA-BPI) on the approval for commercial propagation of Golden Rice in the Philippines and expresses its dismay on critical administrative procedures repeatedly overlooked, despite consistent and repeated attempts on the conduct of public dialogues and consultations.

Critical Administrative Procedures on GR Repeatedly Overlooked

The approval of commercial propagation was made public on July 23 through a media article that mentions the permit for commercialization was issued by the DA-BPI on the 21st of July, 2021. An issue of grave public importance not only to rice farmers but to its potential consumers, SEARICE, along with its network of organizations have repeatedly submitted letters and comments to the DA-BPI and expressed its concern on the lack of transparency of reports and findings of the Golden Rice proponents, along with the related procedures on its approval. The mediatory role and oversight function of the Department of Agriculture is missing in the entire process, as aggrieved stakeholders are only informed of the procedures, either late or only when the proponents wanted to. Through the Stop Golden Rice Network (SGRN), the lack of independent, comprehensive and substantial risk and impact assessments and lack of transparency in findings and reports have also been continually raised.

This is the second time a decision was reached by BPI without an exhaustive public and multi-stakeholder consultation. Prior to this, the biosafety permit on its direct use for food, feed and for processing (FFP) on the GM crop was issued towards the end of December 2019 when government offices are about to go on a holiday break. SEARICE Program Officer for Policy, Cid Ryan Manalo adds, "Although procedural justice is only one part of the whole debate on Golden Rice, this minimum requirement is clearly not being met by DA and BPI. The repeated railroaded decisions take advantage of the pandemic to intentionally exclude those from the other side of the debate."

Marginal Presumed Effects to Vitamin A Deficiency

Proponents of the Golden Rice have evidently shifted their messaging from being a “miracle” curative, targeted solution to one that is “complementary” and only a part of a whole basket of interventions on nutrition security in partial recognition of its marginal effects. On a technical level, the fundamental criticism continues to hold – that significant beta-carotene expressed by the rice grain is lost through related processes on rice consumption. Before it reaches the table only a marginal concentration of beta-carotene is retained in the grain after milling, storage, washing and cooking. Additionally, for the beta-carotene to be absorbed by the body, as it is fat-soluble, it is dependent on the availability of a whole range food sources to targeted populations experiencing chronic nutrition insecurity.

Rural agricultural communities who suffer disproportionately on chronic food and nutrition insecurity require holistic programs that focuses on the food availability and accessibility. The solution lies on the development of local food systems supported by diversification of farming systems with a focus on the needs of smallholder farmers to unshackle them from mono crop cultivation.

Cid continues, “Golden Rice is yet another hit-or-miss relying on the benevolent innocence of its proponents. It fails to recognize and intentionally avoids upsetting political and social structures that are the very reasons why food, nutrition and livelihood insecurity persist with the historically neglected agricultural sector and rural communities. We have to redirect state resources to their needs, tackle agrarian reform and create spaces for sustainability and community empowerment.”

SEARICE calls on farmers groups, consumers and civil society organizations all over the world to join build up protests against these railroaded decisions that lacked transparency of procedures and any genuine intention for a democratic and multi-stakeholder approach in decision-making.

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