



NAST: Golden Rice, Bt eggplant safe to eat, beneficial to farmers

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SAFE. Golden Rice grown on a farm in Sibalom, Antique in this photo taken in February 2023. The National Academy of Science and Technology on Friday (May 3, 2024) reiterated its position that Golden Rice and Bt Eggplant are safe for consumption and helpful for farmers. *(Photo courtesy of Sibalom Municipal Agriculture Office)*

MANILA – A member of the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) on Friday reiterated that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are safe for consumption and are helpful to farmers.

The pronouncement came as the Court of Appeals (CA) recently halted the commercial propagation, field testing, and conduct of activities related to Golden Rice and Bt Eggplant, citing the constitutional right to health and maintaining environmental integrity.

Bt Eggplant comes from a genetically modified seed that eliminates the farmers' need to use pesticides, while Golden Rice is genetically modified to contain beta-carotene using maize or corn, according to chief of the NAST's Agriculture Sciences Division Eufemio Rasco Jr.

"We have long stated that NAST supports the use of GMO. Perhaps the battle on the use of Bt Eggplant and Golden Rice has been there for over 20 years. Some scientist members even lamented that they already feel tired repeating that these are safe to use, consume," Rasco said in an interview.

He, however, clarified that NAST does not condemn the CA decision but would like to reiterate that science and technology provide solutions to pressing concerns.

Citing an example, Rasco said, "During the Covid (coronavirus disease 2019) pandemic, science and technology were able to combat the virus in the environment through the development of vaccines."

He explained that growing Bt Eggplant would enable farmers to reduce rejects and thus have a better yield.

It is also safer to consume as farmers no longer need to use pesticides, he pointed out.

Meanwhile, consumers would benefit from Golden Rice, which Rasco said would help reduce Vitamin A deficiency.

He noted that the developers of these GMOs do not plan to sell these to farmers at high prices.

Meanwhile, about 50 of 111 NAST members have signed the Academy's position on the CA's decision on Bt Eggplant and Golden Rice, maintaining that they are safe to consume.

A copy of NAST's position on the moratorium on products of modern plant breeding was sent to the Supreme Court, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Agriculture, PhilRice, and the Institute of Plant Breeding, he said. (PNA)

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