



Scientists hit CA ruling vs Bt eggplant, GMO

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This file photo shows the Court of Appeals in Manila.

File photo

MANILA, Philippines — A legal victory for militant group Greenpeace, a regrettable loss for Filipinos.

This was how the country's respected academicians and agricultural scientists described the Court of Appeals' April 17 ruling that granted a petition by Greenpeace and its local allies to impose a moratorium on research and development of genetically modified organisms (GMO), and the commercial propagation of Bt eggplant and Golden Rice.

Bt eggplant was genetically engineered to protect the plant from a destructive insect pest. Golden Rice has been fortified with beta carotene to address Vitamin A deficiency in humans.

"The court proceedings that led to this decision are just the latest of very expensive legal struggles initiated by the same group for more than 20 years, not only in the Philippines, to stop the use of modern methods to solve the problems of poverty, hunger and degradation of the environment through plant breeding," the National Academy of Science and Technology - Agricultural Sciences Division (NAST-ASD) said in a position paper issued last Friday.

"The same issues used by Greenpeace to convince the court were earlier dismissed by the Department of Agriculture and repudiated by 129 Nobel Prize Laureates and millions of farmers," the NAST agricultural scientists and academicians added.

For them, the court decision amounts to the weaponization of the law to favor an extreme ideology about nature – that a pristine environment must be preserved and modern biological technology is working against this goal.

“This is contrary to our knowledge that nature is characterized by constant change – some of them man-made, but most of the apocalyptic changes were through natural forces. Among these are climate change, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes,” they said.

Composed of the country’s most respected and awarded scientists and researchers, the NAST, which is under the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), is the country’s highest recognition and scientific advisory body.

“We are alarmed that relatively trivial flaws such as the title of a representative to a local biotechnology regulating body are given undue importance in court deliberations, while insufficiently addressing the bigger question of costs and benefits of the technology to the society,” the NAST-ASD said.

“We are finally concerned that the continuing delay in the use of Bt eggplant and golden rice is causing more harm than good,” it added.

The experts noted that as of 2019, similar products had been used safely by 15 million farmers in 29 countries, including the Philippines.

The NAST academicians and scientists reiterated that agriculture biotechnology has been a big boon to the global effort at greatly reducing the need to use chemical fertilizers in food production, which is becoming an intensifying challenge due to climate change and global warming.

Eggplant and rice farming, especially large-scale rice farming, currently makes use of much fertilizer spray and pellets to assure the harvest of commercial eggplants and rice grains by farmers.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/04/29/2351231/scientists-hit-ca-ruling-vs-bt-eggplant-gmo>