



SIXTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE REPUBLIC)
OF THE PHILIPPINES)
First Regular Session)

'13 SEP 23 AB:24

SENATE
P. S. R. No. 264

REGISTERED

Introduced by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago

RESOLUTION
DIRECTING THE PROPER SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID
OF LEGISLATION, ON THE FORMULATION OF PUBLIC POLICY REGARDING
GENETICALLY-MODIFIED ORGANISMS

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 16, states that “The State shall protect and advance the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature”;

WHEREAS, the Constitution, Article 2, Section 15, states that “The State shall protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them”;

WHEREAS, Republic Act No. 10068, also known as the Organic Agriculture Act, provides in its Declaration of Policy: “It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote, propagate, develop further and implement the practice of organic agriculture in the Philippines that will cumulatively condition and enrich the fertility of the soil, increase farm productivity, reduce pollution and destruction of the environment, prevent the depletion of natural resources, further protect the health of farmers, consumers, and the general public, and save on imported farm inputs. Towards this end, a comprehensive program for the promotion of community-based organic agriculture systems which include, among others, farmer-produced purely organic fertilizers such as compost, pesticides and other farm inputs, together with a nationwide educational and promotional campaign for their use and processing as well as adoption of organic agriculture system as a viable alternative shall be undertaken”;

WHEREAS, Philippine news website Rappler.com, in an article posted last 14 September 2013 with the title “Philippines most 'GMO-friendly' country in Southeast Asia?,” reported that the country is at the crux on its take on genetically-modified organisms (GMOs);

WHEREAS, the news article reported that around 400 farmers, said to be members of anti-GMO alliance SIKWAL-GMO, uprooted the genetically-modified (GM) crop Golden Rice grown in a government-owned testing field in Pili, Camarines Sur in August 2013;

WHEREAS, it was reported that it was the uprooting was the farmers' way of protesting the planting of Golden Rice on Philippine soil, although the act is considered as an act of vandalism by pro-GMO scientists;

WHEREAS, the farmers group reportedly contended that Golden Rice will not benefit local farmers because the crop will contaminate native rice crops and pose risks to public health and the environment, since it was said that there is no recalling their unforeseen impact on soil, organisms, and nearby crops once GM crops are exposed to nature,.

WHEREAS, members of SIKWAL-GMO reportedly claimed that the Department of Agriculture (DA) conducted field tests for Golden Rice, in partnership with Philippine Rice Research Institute, despite promising the contrary after their dialogue in February 2013 where the farmers group aired their concerns to the government agency;

WHEREAS, the framers group reportedly said that they are "very concerned as news about feed testing will start this year and that the harvest will be used in these feed experiments";

WHEREAS, Republic Act No. 10068, also known as the Organic Agriculture Act, reportedly does not include GMOs in its definition of the agricultural systems promoted by the government;

WHEREAS, it was reported that the distinctly yellow Golden Rice has been genetically-engineered to contain more beta carotene—a precursor of Vitamin A—by inserting genes from bacteria and corn into the edible parts of the plant so that beta carotene is produced in the grains as well, as beta carotene is usually found in the leaves of the rice plant;

WHEREAS, it was also reported that Golden Rice has been touted as the "poster boy" of genetically-modified organisms or GMOs because it is said to address Vitamin A deficiency, a leading cause of blindness in children all over the world;

WHEREAS, the World Health Organization reportedly estimates that 250,000 to 500,000 children become Vitamin A deficient each year, half of them dying within months of losing their sight;

WHEREAS, it was reported that a total of 44 GMOs have been approved by the government: 40 for direct use as food, animal feed and food processing and 4 for planting as crops

WHEREAS, it was reported that most of GMOs are genetically-altered corn, soybean, potato, canola, cotton, sugarbeet, and alfalfa;

WHEREAS, they have been reportedly genetically-engineered to resist pests and herbicides, delay ripening or enhance their nutritional value;

WHEREAS, the news article reported that members from the environmental group Greenpeace said that they are disturbed by how "friendly" the Philippines is to GMOs despite more than 60 countries in the world, including Japan, Australia, and countries in the European Union already putting restrictions and bans on GMOs;

WHEREAS, Greenpeace officials reportedly said that the Philippines is the only Southeast Asian country that allows the planting of a GM food crop, and that neighboring countries are more cautious in approving GMOs;

WHEREAS, Greenpeace officials reportedly said that companies producing GMOs use promotions and discounts, and that they give farmers free trial seeds for planting; they also said that some of the farmers have tried planting GM corn but quit after one planting season; it was said that the farmers are forced to plant it again because the credit facilities they borrow from will only grant them loans if they plant GM corn, and that these facilities are partly funded by GM companies like Monsanto;

WHEREAS, it was reported that some GM companies package their GM crops with their other products, giving the example of Roundup Ready corn by Monsanto being genetically-programmed to be resistant only to Roundup herbicide, a product also by Monsanto;

WHEREAS, Greenpeace officials reportedly claim that more than 50% of food in an average grocery in the Philippines are GMOs or contain GMOs;

WHEREAS, the environmentalist group reportedly claim that these food items, if it's highly processed, will probably contain canola, extenders like corn and soya, and these are imported from the US where GMOs are one of their largest industries;

WHEREAS, it was reported that a 2009 study published by the International Journal of Biological Sciences reported disturbances in the organ functions of rats fed with 3 types of GM corn, including Roundup Ready corn by Monsanto, and that there were disturbances in the rats' kidney and liver, and effects in their heart, adrenal, spleen and blood cells;

WHEREAS, the news article quote the 2009 scientific study's conclusion that "The highly statistically significant disturbances in the function of these organs, seen between male and female rats, cannot be dismissed as biologically insignificant as has been proposed by others," and that their data "strongly suggest that these GM maize varieties induce a state of hepatorenal toxicity";

WHEREAS, hepatorenal toxicity can ultimately lead to hepatorenal syndrome, a life-threatening condition characterized by the rapid deterioration of kidneys;

WHEREAS, it was also reported that the two other varieties of GM corn are genetically engineered to produce their own insecticide, and are also found in the market today;

WHEREAS, the Rappler.com article also mentioned a Cornell study that reported about toxic pollen from Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) corn has led to the deaths of monarch butterflies due to the GM corn killing "nontarget" organisms like honeybees and ladybugs—which are essential to agricultural ecosystems as pollinators or predators of pests—as a side effect of Bt corn producing its own insecticide to kill crop-damaging pests;

WHEREAS, it was reported that Thelma Soriano, senior agriculturist of the Biotech Core Team—the government agency charged with approving and monitoring GMO applications—said that the Philippines is just open to all agricultural tools, methods, and technologies that can be of help to the Filipino farmer, so long as this is safe for human and animal consumption and the environment;

WHEREAS, Soriano reportedly added that crop biotechnology is just an option, and that it is the farmers who will decide if they need the technology or not for their particular farm;

WHEREAS, the news report quoted Soriano saying that Biotech Core Team (BCT) "has never encountered denying a GM crop for direct use for food, feed or for processing. So far, all of the GM crops applied for these purposes have first been developed as a complete finished product and approved for direct use as food, feed or processing in the country of origin";

WHEREAS, the Rappler.com news article reported that Dr. Ben Peczon, a scientist and member of pro-GMO Biotechnology Coalition of the Philippines, said that although many aspects of GMOs remain a mystery, it does not mean the technology should be condemned outright;

WHEREAS, Peczon reportedly said that GMOs can be a boon to the country, if given a chance, since the country needs food, fuel, and fiber for its population and to create assets because GMOs can increase crop yield per hectare by genetically-coding crops to protect themselves from pests and herbicides;

WHEREAS, the Rappler.com news article said that a United Nations-commissioned report, on the other hand, pointed out that the world can get by without GMOs, since 93% of the planet's cultivated land still uses conventional farming, and GMO use is largely concentrated in countries like the US, Argentina, Brazil and Canada;

WHEREAS, it was reported that the Court of Appeals in May 2013 stopped the nationwide field testing of the GM eggplant saying, "there is no full scientific certainty yet as to the effects of Bt talong field trials to the environment and to the health of the people" through a petition filed by Greenpeace and farmers' group Masipag who opposed the field testing being done by respondents UP Los Baños Foundation Inc, UP Mindanao Foundation Inc, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources;


WHEREAS, it was also reported that the Court of Appeals chose to uphold the precautionary principle which states that "when human activities may lead to threats of serious and irreversible damage to the environment that is scientifically plausible but uncertain, actions shall be taken to avoid or diminish the threat";

WHEREAS, the issue on GMOs provides a challenge for Congress in following its mandate of protecting the country's environment and natural resource while securing the sufficiency of basic necessities for every Filipino;

WHEREAS, Congress should formulate legislation and public policy on GMOs in order to define it and acknowledge its relevance in existing laws on the agriculture, health, and trade and industry;

WHEREFORE, be it hereby resolved by the Philippine Senate to direct the proper Senate committee to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the formulation of public policy regarding genetically-modified organisms.

Adopted,

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MIRIAM DEFENSOR SANTIAGO

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