Sabotage by anti-science militants

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http://www.irri.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=12638:malnutrition-fight-not-over-golden-rice-research-continues&lang=en (**Media release of the International Rice Research Institute IRRI**)

Malnutrition fight not over, Golden Rice research continues

Fast facts

- Vitamin A deficiency is a public health problem in the Philippines and affects children and mothers worst.
- We are conducting Golden Rice field trials to understand Golden Rice better as a potential way to reduce malnutrition.
- The field trials are approved by the Philippine government regulators and are an essential part of our research, but one location of trials has been vandalized.

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Related links

- Visit to vandalized Golden Rice field trial (Blog, 11 Aug 2013)
- Golden Rice field trial vandalized (Blog, 9 Aug 2012)
- Malnutrition fight goes on, Golden Rice research continues (Media release, 8 Aug 2013)
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- Rice and a healthy diet
- Healthier rice varieties

One of our Golden Rice field trials located in the Bicol region of the Philippines has been vandalized.

Dr. Bruce Tolentino makes a statement that Golden Rice research to improve nutrition will continue despite field trial vandalism.

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) – Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) are continuing to fight malnutrition in the Philippines, and continuing Golden Rice research as a potential way to reduce vitamin A deficiency.

“Golden Rice field trials are part of our work to see if Golden Rice can be a safe and effective way to reduce vitamin A deficiency in the Philippines – to reduce malnutrition,” said Dr. Bruce Tolentino, deputy director general of communications and partnerships at IRRI. “Vitamin A deficiency is horrible and unnecessary, and we want to do our part to help to reduce it."

“Our Golden Rice research is part of our humanitarian work to reduce vitamin A deficiency that mostly affects women and children – causing sickness, blindness, and even death,” Tolentino said. “Earlier today one of our Golden Rice field trials located in the Bicol region of the Philippines was vandalized. We are really disappointed that our Golden Rice field trial was vandalized, but it is just one trial and we will continue our Golden Rice research to improve human nutrition.”

In the Philippines, vitamin A deficiency affects approximately 1.7 million children (15.2%) aged 6 months to 5 years. Subclinical vitamin A deficiency affects one out of every ten pregnant women.

Golden Rice is a new type of rice that contains beta carotene, which is converted to vitamin A when eaten. Research so far indicates that eating about one cup a day of Golden Rice could provide half of an adult's vitamin A needs.

IRRI is working with leading nutrition and agricultural research organizations to develop and evaluate Golden Rice as a potential new way to reduce vitamin A deficiency in the Philippines, Bangladesh and other countries.

In the Philippines, all GM research and development under contained conditions are overseen by the Department of Science and Technology - National Committee on Biosafety of the Philippines. The Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Plant Industry (DA-BPI) strictly monitors field trials, coordinates evaluation of biosafety information, and approves GM crops if appropriate.

Dr. Antonio Alfonso, leader of Golden Rice research at PhilRice, inspects a Golden Rice field trial.
(Photo credit: PhilRice)

More photos of Golden Rice.

Golden Rice field trials are being conducted in the Philippines by PhilRice and IRRI. The field trials have been permitted by DA-BPI, the national regulatory authority in the Philippines for crop biotechnology research and development, after establishing that the trials will pose no significant risks to human health and environment.

The Golden Rice field site that was vandalized was located within the Department of Agriculture Regional Field Unit 5's (DA-RFU5) Bicol Experiment Station in Pili, Camarines Sur. The Golden Rice trial site is less than 1,000 square metres (or 0.1 hectare). Nearly all plants have been uprooted and left on site.

"We all want to answer questions about Golden Rice," Tolentino added. "Therefore, we need to test Golden Rice and test it according to the best and most rigorous research standards. This means continuing field trials to ensure there is adequate data and analysis that will enable informed decisions on Golden Rice."

"At IRRI, we remain dedicated to improving nutrition for everyone in the Philippines and in other rice-eating countries," Tolentino said. "We're here for the long term, and Golden Rice and other healthier rice are part of our efforts to help reduce malnutrition among rice-consumers."

http://www.farmersguardian.com/home/latest-news/gm-golden-rice-trials-ripped-up-by-campaigners/57910.article

GM golden rice trials ripped up by campaigners

9 August 2013 | By Olivia Midgley

VANDALS have ripped up a GM golden rice field trial in the Philippines.

Militants who claim the trials pose a serious risk to human health and the environment swooped on the experimental farm at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Pili yesterday (Thursday).

Dr. V. Bruce J. Tolentino, deputy director general (communications and partnerships) at the International Rice Research Institute speaks after the golden rice field trial was targeted by campaigners.

http://www.irri.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=12638:malnutrition-fight-not-over-golden-rice-research-continues&lang=en (Media release of the International Rice Research Institute IRRI)

Research suggests golden rice boosts vitamin A levels and can reduce blindness in developing countries.

Last month Environment Secretary Owen Paterson said its blockage by campaigners was one of the reasons children were dying in developing countries.

He said: “The World Health Organisation estimates that up to 500,000 children go irreversibly blind a year and 250,000 of those actually die.

“The problem is mainly in South-East Asia but over the last 15 years despite offering the seeds for free to those who would need them, every attempt to deploy this golden rice has been thwarted. In that time 7 million children have gone blind or died.”

The IRRI said despite the attack, the ‘malnutrition fight will go on’.

Deputy director general for communications and partnership, Dr Bruce Tolentino, said: “We are glad to report that everyone is safe and that no one was injured during the day’s events, including everyone on the research team, other staff on the site, the local police and village peace-keeping force, and the protesters.

“We are all disappointed and saddened by the action as many people in the Department of Agriculture, the Philippine Rice Research Institute, IRRI and our other partners locally, nationally, and internationally have been working hard on the field trials to help us continue our research to improve nutrition.”

Nearly all the golden rice plants were uprooted and left on site.

Readers' comments (2)

- gubulgaria | 9 August 2013 1:04 pm

  Funny, all the other reports of this incident describe the people who uprooted the crops as local farmers. '400 local farmers', if I remember correctly.

  But according to this piece they were 'militants', 'vandals', 'campaigners' or 'protestors'.

  Then we have a third of the piece going into detail of how no-one was injured, as though there was a risk they might have been. Why would pulling up plants injure anyone? Or does Farmers Guardian do this as a matter of routine?

  "The prize for the biggest marrow was won for the second year in a row by Mr Amos Giles. We are glad to report that everyone is safe and that no one was injured during the day’s events, including everyone on the judging team, other staff on the site, the local police and village peace-keeping force, and the contestans."

  I feel sorry for anyone trying to use this site as a news source.

  Unsuitable or offensive? Report this comment

- barry white | 12 August 2013 7:31 am

  @gubulgaria: Fantastic! well done for highlighting FG's long rooted bias for GM crops as opposed to journalistic integrity.

http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/the-costs-of-opposing-gm-foods-by-bj-rn-lomborg

A Golden Rice Opportunity

SÃO PAULO – Finally, after 12 years of delay caused by opponents of genetically modified (GM) foods, so-called "golden rice" with vitamin A will be grown in the Philippines. Over those 12 years, about eight million children worldwide died from vitamin A deficiency. Are anti-GM advocates not partly responsible?


Illustration by Paul Lachine

Golden rice is the most prominent example in the global controversy over GM foods, which pits a technology with some risks but incredible potential against the resistance of feel-good campaigning. Three billion people depend on rice as their staple food, with 10% at risk for vitamin A deficiency, which, according to the World Health Organization, causes 250,000-500,000 children to go blind each year. Of these, half die within a year. A study from the British medical journal *The Lancet* estimates that, in total, vitamin A deficiency kills 668,000 children under the age of five each year.

Yet, despite the cost in human lives, anti-GM campaigners – from Greenpeace to Naomi Klein – have derided efforts to use golden rice to avoid vitamin A deficiency. In India, Vandana Shiva, an environmental activist and adviser to the government, called golden rice "a hoax" that is "creating hunger and malnutrition, not solving it."

*The New York Times Magazine*reported in 2001 that one would need to "eat 15 pounds of cooked golden rice a day" to get enough vitamin A. What was an exaggeration then is demonstrably wrong now. Two recent studies in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* show that just 50 grams (roughly two ounces) of golden rice can provide 60% of the recommended daily intake of vitamin A. They show that golden rice is even better than spinach in providing vitamin A to children.

Opponents maintain that there are better ways to deal with vitamin A deficiency. In its latest statement, Greenpeace says that golden rice is "neither needed nor necessary," and calls instead for supplementation and fortification, which are described as "cost-effective."

To be sure, handing out vitamin pills or adding vitamin A to staple products can make a difference. But it is not a sustainable solution to vitamin A deficiency. And, while it is cost-effective, recent published estimates indicate that golden rice is much more so.

Supplementation programs costs $4,300 for every life they save in India, whereas fortification programs cost about $2,700 for each life saved. Both are great deals. But golden rice would cost just $100 for every life saved from vitamin A deficiency.

Similarly, it is argued that golden rice will not be adopted, because most Asians eschew brown rice. But brown rice is substantially different in taste and spoils easily in hot climates. Moreover, many Asian dishes are already colored yellow with saffron, annatto, achiote, and turmeric. The people, not Greenpeace, should decide whether they will adopt vitamin A-rich rice for themselves and their children.

Most ironic is the self-fulfilling critique that many activists now use. Greenpeace calls golden rice a "failure," because it "has been in development for almost 20 years and has still not made any impact on the prevalence of vitamin A deficiency." But, as Ingo Potrykus, the scientist who developed golden rice, has made clear, that failure is due almost entirely to relentless opposition to GM foods – often by rich, well-meaning Westerners far removed from the risks of actual vitamin A deficiency.

Regulation of goods and services for public health clearly is a good idea; but it must always be balanced against potential costs – in this case, the cost of not providing more vitamin A to eight million children over the past 12 years.

As an illustration, current regulations for GM foods, if applied to non-GM products, would bar the sale of potatoes and tomatoes, which can contain poisonous glycoalkaloids; celery, which contains carcinogenic psoralens; rhubarb and spinach (oxalic acid); and cassava, which feeds about half a billion people, but contains toxic cyanogenic alkaloids. Foodstuffs like soy, wheat, milk, eggs, mollusks, crustaceans, fish, sesame, nuts, peanuts, and kiwi would likewise be banned, because they can cause food allergies.

Here it is worth noting that there have been no documented human health effects from GM foods. But many campaigners have claimed other effects. A common story, still repeated by Shiva, is that GM corn with Bt toxin kills Monarch butterflies. Several peer-reviewed studies, however, have effectively established that "the impact of Bt corn pollen from current commercial hybrids on monarch butterfly populations is negligible."

Greenpeace and many others claim that GM foods merely enable big companies like Monsanto to wield near-monopoly power. But that puts the cart before the horse: The predominance of big companies partly reflects anti-GM activism, which has made the approval process so long and costly that only rich companies catering to first-world farmers can afford to see it through.

Finally, it is often claimed that GM crops simply mean costlier seeds and less money for farmers. But farmers have a choice. More than five million cotton farmers in India have flocked to GM cotton, because it yields higher net incomes. Yes, the seeds are more expensive, but the rise in production offsets the additional cost.

Of course, no technology is without flaws, so regulatory oversight is useful. But it is worth maintaining some perspective. In 2010, the European Commission, after considering 25 years of GM-organisms (GMOs) research, concluded that "there is, as of today, no scientific evidence associating GMOs with higher risks for the environment or for food and feed safety than conventional plants and organisms."

Now, finally, golden rice will come to the Philippines; after that, it is expected in Bangladesh and Indonesia. But, for eight million kids, the wait was too long.

True to form, Greenpeace is already protesting that "the next 'golden rice' guinea pigs might be Filipino children." The 4.4 million Filipino kids with vitamin A deficiency might not mind so much.

Read more at http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/the-costs-of-opposing-gm-foods-by-bj-rn-lomborg#jZ3IzMOGxAQPIBl3.99