

Philippines approves nutritionally-enhanced GMO Golden Rice for human consumption

After rigorous biosafety assessment, Golden Rice “has been found to be as safe as conventional rice” by the Philippine Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Plant Industry. The biosafety permit, addressed to the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), details the approval of GR2E Golden Rice for direct use as food and feed, or for processing (FFP).

PhilRice Executive Director Dr. John de Leon welcomed the positive regulatory decision. “With this FFP approval, we bring forward a very accessible solution to our country’s problem on Vitamin A deficiency that’s affecting many of our pre-school children and pregnant women.”

Despite the success of public health interventions like oral supplementation, complementary feeding, and nutrition education, Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) among children aged 6 months to 5 years increased from 15.2 percent in 2008 to 20.4 percent in 2013 in the Philippines. The beta-carotene content of Golden Rice aims to provide 30 to 50 percent of the estimated average requirement (EAR) of vitamin A for pregnant women and young children.

“IRRI is pleased to partner with PhilRice to develop this nutrition-sensitive agricultural solution to address hidden hunger. This is the core of IRRI’s purpose: to tailor global solutions to local needs,” notes IRRI Director General Matthew Morrell. “The Philippines has long recognized the potential to harness biotechnology to help address food and nutrition security, environmental safety, as well as improve the livelihoods of farmers.”

The FFP approval is the latest regulatory milestone in the journey to develop and deploy Golden Rice in the Philippines. With this approval, PhilRice and IRRI will now proceed with sensory evaluations and finally answer the question that many Filipinos have been asking: What does Golden Rice taste like?

To complete the Philippine biosafety regulatory process, Golden Rice will require approval for commercial propagation before it can be made available to the public. This follows from the field trials harvested in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija and San Mateo, Isabela in September and October 2019.

The Philippines now joins a select group of countries that have affirmed the safety of Golden Rice. In 2018, Food Standards Australia New Zealand, Health Canada, and the United States Food and Drug Administration published positive food safety assessments for Golden Rice. A biosafety application was lodged in November 2017 and is currently undergoing review by the Biosafety Core Committee in Bangladesh.

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