

## Philippines' progress on biotech crop and animal approvals slowed by COVID pandemic

The Philippines is a biotechnology leader in Southeast Asia, highlighted by its co-sponsorship of the International Statement on Agricultural Applications of Precision Biotechnology at the World Trade Organization this year. With the many challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, key milestones that were expected in 2020 have been delayed.

The country approved Golden Rice for direct use in December of 2019, while the application for commercial propagation is expected soon. Likewise pending are positive regulatory developments that are now likely to be completed in 2021, including the review of current biotechnology regulations embodied in the Joint Departmental Circular of 2016.

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Meanwhile, next year should also see the debut of regulatory frameworks for genetically engineered animals and for new breeding techniques (e.g. gene editing).

The Philippines is a regional biotechnology leader, having been the first Asian country to allow the planting of a genetically engineered (GE) crop (Bt corn in 2003), and is moving forward on a regulatory framework for GE animals and products of innovative biotechnologies... A change in GE plant regulations as embodied in Department of Agriculture (DA) Administrative Order No. 8 (DA-AO 8) to the Joint Department Circular (JDC) on April 15, 2016, however, has slowed the processing of biosafety applications.

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