

'I asked for a greenhouse made of bulletproof glass': Golden Rice developer feared activist retaliation for creating genetically modified vitamin A-boosted variety

In July 2000, Ingo Potrykus thought he was both at the peak and at the end of his career. He was about to retire from ETH Zurich when his face graced the cover of "Time Magazine". It showed the plant researcher in the middle of a rice field, ears of corn swirling around his gray beard. "This rice could save a million children a year," was written next to it in large, black letters. Together with the Freiburg biologist Peter Beyer, Potrykus created a sensation. They had modified the genes of a rice grain so that the plant that grew from it secreted the pigment beta-carotene in its fruits.

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Profil: ETH Zurich built a greenhouse made of bulletproof glass especially for their first plants. Why?

Potrykus: I asked the management of the university myself to do this. The mood against transgenic plants was so heated that I had to fear that ideologized students wanted to destroy my work with machine guns or hand grenades. The construction was a huge effort.

Profil: But the glass house was not yet safe enough for the activists.

Potrykus: Right. They demanded a greenhouse that was also equipped to withstand plane crashes.

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Profil: In 2013, test fields were destroyed in the Philippines. Were you there at the time?

Potrykus: No. But as a professor at ETH, I was exposed to countless attacks. The students became loud and aggressive during my lectures on transgenetics, and I sometimes had serious concerns about whether physical attacks would occur.

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Profil: Do you think that the bitter resistance has now been broken?

Potrykus: No. Greenpeace has not given up yet. They appealed the approval to the Supreme Court in the Philippines. The proceedings are still pending.

[Editor's note: This article has been translated from German and edited for clarity.]

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here**](#)