

COMMUNITY & HABITAT

MONOGRAPH SERIES NO. 1
OCTOBER 2004

On Genetically Modified Organism (GMO)

*Genetically Modified Organism Policy in the Philippines:
The Great Debate over High-Tech Farming and Food*

by Molly M. Mimier

Intern, Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement

GMO Memo

by Roberto Verzola

Anti-GMO Campaigner and anti-Bt corn hunger striker



Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement

PRRM Conrado Benitez Institute for Sustainability

COMMUNITY & HABITAT

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Editor's Note

The PRRM Conrado Benitez Institute for Sustainability (PRRM-CBIS) is happy to announce the publication of this Monograph Series. This is intended to be a companion piece to the PRRM journal Community & Habitat which, unfortunately, cannot come out as regularly as promised due mainly to rising publication costs. Alongside we are also exploring other communication media to get our materials out to a wider readership beyond the PRRM family circle and networks.

The Monograph Series will address one theme every issue for better focus. Over time we hope to be able to cover most of the issues we believe are crucial and relevant to learning about sustainability.

This first issue is about the contentious subject of genetically-modified organisms or GMO. We have selected two articles by two authors who have done in-depth studies on the subject.

The first article, by Molly M. Mollier, a former intern of PRRM, describes the lay of the land, so to say. It walks us through the policy and legislative territory and the range of contending views surrounding the GMO question or what she calls the great debate over high-tech farming and food. The second, by Roberto Verzola, who describes himself as an anti-GMO campaigner and anti-Bt corn hunger striker, comes in the form of a public memo. This highly synthetic piece sums up the author's take of the state of the debate and what he suggests to be the most reasonable and sound policy option to adopt.

We engage the GMO debate from the perspective of our advocacy for sustainable agriculture. For much too long Philippine agriculture has been driven by the Green Revolution. We have seen how GR had increased productivity dramatically. But as well we have seen steady declines in farmers' incomes due in large part to the high cost of the GR technology input. This is to say nothing about the massive chemical poisoning of our farmlands and water resources.

And now we have the GMO, perhaps expecting to trigger a second GR. Again, almost like an obsession, the intention is to boost productivity. We now know better: increase in productivity, while also a desirable goal, hardly assures a better life for small farmers and the rural poor.

No one, neither GMO proponents nor opponents, can say for sure where GMO will take us. Somebody might get sick or die from other causes. We assume that the uncertainty will not be resolved soon enough to inform our policy options. But already, government has taken the liberal approach---jump and fix the problem later.

We however suggest that a precautionary approach would be better. For one, because like the GMO pushers we're just as unsure about consequences. Two, and more important, why not exhaust the productivity potentials and possibilities of sustainable agriculture? For example, the System of Rice Intensification or SRI---an age-old rice farming practice that requires less seeds, little or no chemical input, less water but brings higher yield---can very well meet our rice self-sufficiency level (4 tons/hectare, according to government). SRI can do much better than hybrid rice or genetic engineering. It deserves to be supported by policy.

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October 2004

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