



# COALITION FOR AGRICULTURE MODERNIZATION IN THE PHILIPPINES, INC. (CAMP)

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## **SERIOUS PROBLEMS POSED BY HOUSE BILL 3686 ON GMO LABELING**

### **Paper by the Coalition for Agriculture Modernization in the Philippines (CAMP)**

House Bill 3686 assumes that genetically modified crops pose health and environmental concerns. It cites a number of countries, particularly those in the European Union, which have banned the planting and entry of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into their food systems. It does not mention that GMOs are planted in Spain, Portugal, Slovakia and the Czech Republic which are part of the EU.

The main point of House Bill 3686 is that “the State shall endeavor to provide Filipinos with safe and healthy food and agricultural products that will not jeopardize their health and place the environment at risk.” In effect, House Bill 3686 argues that labeling is required so that consumers who believe GMOs are not safe can avoid them.

However, the following facts need be highlighted to guide our lawmakers who are thinking of approving House Bill 3686:

- 1. Lengthy periods of use validate the view of that GMOs or GM products are safe with respect to human health and the environment.**

Since GMOs have been approved by Philippine government experts before they were grown and sold and subsequently consumed, that approval indicates that they are safe. If a GMO is not safe, it should not be allowed to be grown and to enter the food supply. Labeling should not be a substitute for safety assessment.

All the major National Academies of Sciences throughout the world have stated that GMOs are no more dangerous than conventionally and organically grown crops. This includes the European Academy of Science.

The science telling us GM crops and foods are safe has been confirmed by vast experience. Humans have eaten hundreds of billions of GM based meals in the past 21 years (15 years in the Philippines) without a single validated case of any problem resulting from GM consumption. More than a hundred billion livestock animals consumed GM feed from 1996 until the present time, during which time the average health of livestock animals improved.

- 2. GMOs have provided huge economic benefits.**

The cumulative economic benefit of the sole GMO plant, corn, planted in the Philippines since its introduction in December 2002 is estimated to be US\$642 or roughly ₱33.4 billion.



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Accounting for 65 percent of Philippine maize production in 2016, its economic value in that year was US\$82 million or roughly ₱4.3 billion. Requiring labeling will diminish that economic gain which affects 400,000 farmers. A study has shown that Filipino farmers who planted GMO corn earned about ₱8,000 more per month than farmers who did not use GMO seeds.

### 3. GMOs are solutions to many environmental problems

GMOs have not manifested any environmental problems. They are, in fact, considered solutions to many environmental problems as explained below:

- Pest-resistant (corn, cotton, eggplant, sugarcane, potatoes, poplar), weedicide resistant (soybean, canola, corn, sugar beets, alfalfa) and disease resistant GMO crops (papaya, squash,) have greatly reduced the need for chemical agents. Traditional chemical agents to kill pests and control diseases pose health threats to farmers and consumers alike and cause environmental pollution. GMOs created to withstand specific weeds decrease the need for plowing thereby minimizing soil erosion. Increased yields through the use of GMOs reduce the need to convert forests for food production, thereby minimizing cutting down of trees as the population increases in order to meet greater food needs.

### 4. A multitude of GMOs with desirable traits are in the world-wide R&D pipeline

These include:

- More crops (rice, banana, wheat, barley, camelina) and trees (citrus) which are pest resistant, disease resistant, weedicide resistant and have other desirable characteristics such as drought tolerance, capability to survive salinity, are more nutritious, are easier to process (for the pulp and paper industry), are stronger, grow faster and other desirable characteristics which presently cannot be achieved by traditional breeding technology.
- Cattle which are resistant to tuberculosis, have greater muscle mass, produce milk with less allergens, release much less methane gas (negative impact on climate change), and produce antibodies that can be used to treat Ebola, Zika and influenza. Dairy cattle with no horns.
- Pigs which are more disease resistant, have more meat and less fat, digest phosphorus more efficiently (results in less phosphorus in their manure, thereby reducing oxygen depletion and algal bloom in waste water).
- Fish which grow much quicker.



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- Yeast which produce a new generation of antibiotics and anti-inflammatories.
- Vaccines against influenza, hepatitis B, Zika, ebola, AIDS and cervical, anal, throat and vaginal cancers.

These R&D initiatives listed are only the tip of the iceberg. The innovations in the health sector are particularly beneficial. Biotechnology is a game changer which will provide a plethora of desirable new products.

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## 5. **Deconstructing the European position.**

In 2010 the European Commission published a report which stated, “The main conclusion to be drawn from the efforts of more than 130 research projects, covering more than 250 years of research, and involving more than 500 research groups, is that biotechnology, and in particular, GMOs are not per se more risky than conventional plant breeding technologies.” In 2016, the four EU countries mentioned in the first paragraph of this paper planted GM corn on 337,000 acres. The UK leads Europe in innovative agriculture biotechnology research. In that country the government and other public figures have given statements in support of GMO crops. With farmers prohibited from planting GMOs, in order to remain competitive, many European livestock farmers rely on grain imports; they import more than 30,000,000 tons of GMO corn and soy for livestock feed annually. In a word, the EU is conflicted. Some may view this stance of banning cultivation but allowing importation as being hypocritical.

Some countries in the EU can afford to ban GMOs because their falling birth rates decreases worries about food security, unlike in the Philippines where we perennially import food in part because of Philippine population growth. Moreover, at present, absent a trade war in the grains trade, advantageous commodity prices grant EU countries the luxury of importing the commodities needed.

## 6. **Greenpeace, a \$100-million a year multinational entity, has falsely claimed that GMOs are dangerous, untested, and inadequately regulated.**

Greenpeace has severely and repeatedly misrepresented facts and distorted policy deliberations. Their extensive misrepresentations have provoked India into revoking their license to operate due to “fraud”. This follows official sanctions against Greenpeace for dishonest propaganda campaigns in Australia and Canada.

## 7. **Former Leaders of Greenpeace and strong critics of GMO have changed their minds.**

Stephen Tindale was for six years the head of Greenpeace UK, and Patrick Moore was a founding member of Greenpeace and served for nine years as President of



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Greenpeace Canada and seven years as a Director of Greenpeace International. Over time, both Tindale and Moore came to realize that the facts did not support many of the opposition campaigns they had worked on through Greenpeace. They are now staunch supporters of Golden Rice and agricultural biotechnology.

Other famous personalities who were strong critics of GMO also changed their minds. They are:

- Richard de Natale, a physician, a Senator in the Australian Parliament, and head of the Australian Green Party
- Mark Lynas who actively participated during the late 1990's in protests and vandalism of GMO field trials in the UK
- Steward Brand, famous author and icon of the modern environment movement, who later realized that GMOs are good for the environment.
- Bill Nye, the science guy.

## **8. The opposition to GMO is not based on any scientific evidence but instead is based on ideology which utilizes fear-mongering.**

The cover page of the March 2015 issue of National Geographic is “The War on Science.” The article covered misconceptions harbored by the poorly-informed. These misconceptions are: climate change is not real; vaccinations cause autism; the lunar landing was staged; and GMOs are evil.

Mandatory GMO labeling is intended to appease the noisy minority to the detriment of the majority. Lawmakers and leaders of the Philippines must lead in the utilization of established, validated science, including biotechnology in order to meet national development goals. There was a time when the Philippines was considered second only to Japan in terms of technological leadership. Too many missteps have strangled advances. We must not shoot ourselves in the foot again.

## **9. The simple act of labeling GMOs or GM products will cast doubt on their safety and reduce government support for scientific innovation in biotechnology.**

Labeling GMOs or GM products spreads serious misinformation on GMOs. It casts doubts on their safety and translates to impeding the growth and expansion of the safe and responsible use of biotechnology. By impeding scientific activities, life on planet earth loses technological advantages because of ignorance. We must remember that great strides were made possible in large measure by application of science, including the application of science to ensure safe and responsible biotechnology



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## **10. Labeling of GMOs will increase the price of food products, which will have negative impact on the lives of poor people.**

Mandatory labeling in commercial products will cost money which can be put to better use. There will be monitoring costs, need to build laboratories or other means to detect and quantify GMOs, training of personnel to run these laboratories or perform the tests, and training of police, prosecutors and judges to implement such a law if it ever came to pass. These additional costs will be passed on to consumers. These additional labeling costs will affect the food manufacturers who can least afford them, namely, small and medium size Filipino-owned food companies. Large food manufacturers, many of which are not owned by Filipinos, can more readily absorb the labeling costs.

The latest data (2015) available from the Philippine Statistics Authority show that about 21.6 percent of Filipinos are classified as poor, with farmers and fisherfolk registering a poverty incidence of about 33%. These very poor people will suffer more because of higher costs of food products attendant to GMO labeling. GMO labeling therefore will be a hindrance in the Philippine development goal of decreasing poverty incidence.

## **11. Some manufacturers will put non-GMO labels on their products to increase their sales, which is tantamount to a campaign against GMOs.**

For example, a well-known orange juice manufacturer would include “non-GMO” on its label to increase sales when in fact there are no commercially grown, genetically engineered oranges.

Similar misleading labels in many products intended simply to increase sales would in effect say buy non-GMOs. Why? Obviously, the answer is “GMOs are not safe and should be avoided!” This is also spreading serious misinformation on GMOs!

## **12. The technical issues regarding labeling can create a regulatory nightmare.**

Among the issues which will arise are:

- Rationale for the different threshold limits imposed in various countries.
- Coherent rationale for multi-ingredient products.
- Distinguishing items between those produced by GMOs from those produced by conventional source. Presently, existing technology may not be able to distinguish between such products.
- What exemptions will be allowed? Will vendors be required to label products sold in formal and informal markets, particularly in rural areas? Will labeling be required restaurants and other food outlets?



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**In summary, the Coalition for Agriculture Modernization in the Philippines (CAMP) does not support GMO labeling in any GM food or GM products. The twelve points explained above should not be ignored by lawmakers. House Bill 3686 should not be approved.**