

Plea to lift ban on GMO heard today in Bacolod

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By Serge C. Santillan

BACOLOD CITY – A public consultation on the proposal of certain sectors to lift the provincial ordinance banning Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) will be held today at the Social Hall of the Provincial Capitol starting 8:30 a.m.

Gov. Isidro Zayco will deliver the welcome address while Lee Aruelo will explain the salient features of Provincial Ordinance 007 Series of 2007. Dr. Chito Medina of MASIPAG will speak on GMO and food security. Nicanor Perlas on the other hand will discuss GMO and food safety.

Recently, Gov. Isidro Zayco has created an ad hoc committee to find a win-win solution to the call to lift the ban on GMO entering Negros Occidental and the opposition to such move.

The ad hoc committee will be chaired by Board Member Adolfo Mangao, who heads the Sangguniang Panlalawigan Committee on Agriculture, with Provincial Agriculturist Igmedio Tabianan and Provincial Veterinarian Renante Decena as vice chairmen, Zayco said.

Members of the ad hoc committee are Board Members Melvin Ibañez and Enrique Lacson, Albert Lim – president of the National Federation of Hog Farmers Inc., Boyet Uychiat of the Negros Island Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development Foundation Inc., Manuel Puey – president of the Negros Occidental Poultry Raisers Association, Rodney Ta-ala – president of the Alliance of Hog Raisers Associations, Ramon Uy of the Occidental Negros Organic Producers and Retailers Association, Kid Bañas of the Negros Organic Agriculture Movement and a Greenpeace representative, the governor said.

Whatever is agreed upon by the ad hoc committee will be used by the SP in determining its course of action on the GMO ban ordinance, Zayco added.

Some biotechnology advocates urged government officials and the public to be more open to other information on genetically-modified organisms and products with the ongoing ban on GMOs in Negros Occidental.

Abraham Manalo, executive secretary of the Biotechnology Coalition of the Philippines, said much of policy makers' and people's fears on the negative effects of biotechnology, particularly GMOs, have been caused by misconceptions.

“There is lack of information. There is still that misconception that modern biotechnology is unsafe but scientific researches have proven otherwise,” he added.

On the issue of GM crops like corn, Manalo said multi-national companies have spent at least \$80 million to study and test them for possible hazards on health, environment, among others, before they were allowed to sell them.

Manalo also pointed out that the approving bodies that allowed the sale and use of current GM products in the world market are international organizations recognized by the Philippines like the World Health Organization and the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.

“The government should put stringent measures to regulate their utilization,” he added.

Manalo suggested that GM farming be done with the organic way by putting physical barriers between GM crops and the organic ones.

“GM crops can be planted ahead of organic plants if farmers would still want to produce organic-only products,” he added.