"fabian"

21/05/2012 16:28

To "Mandy YM POON" <mpoon@legco.gov.hk>
cc
bcc
Subject Genetically Modified Papayas in Hong Kong

History: This message has been forwarded.

2 attachments

2012-05-19 Thailand - The Nation - GMO-tainted papaya crops.doc

2012-05-20 Thailand - The Nation - GMO-tainted papayas.doc

Subcommittee on Genetically Modified Organisms
(Control of Release) (Exemption) Notice

Invitation for Submissions

Dear Ms. Poon,

This has just come to our attention and we would like to submit limited comments on this topic, as the introduction of genetically modified organisms that could affect local natural organisms is part of our concerns when carrying out our environmental protection and nature conservation work.

The reason offered by the Administration for proposing the deregulation of GM Papayas in the SAR is that this type of papaya has become prevalent and it would be difficult or impracticable to try to enact or enforce legislation that could protect the integrity of local papaya seeds and crops. It is noted that the biosafety aspect of this proposed liberalization in GM papaya control regime has been assessed and it is thought not to pose any adverse biosafety impacts on the biological diversity of the local environment. It is further stated that possible adverse biosafety effects would be considered to be acceptable under the Ordinance.

Our comment is that if on the one hand it is stated that the introduction of GM papaya is thought not to pose any adverse biosafety impacts, while on the other hand is is further stated that possible biosafety effects would be acceptable, we have a situation where the Administration admits that it does not clearly know whether there will be biosafety impacts or not, or their possible extent, but nevertheless wishes to reassure the public that accepting and promoting GM papayas is not just a realistic but also a safe course to take. We feel that in this

process the precautionary principle may have been undermined and as such we wish to express reservations about the proposed changes.

It is noted that the Administration intends to step up publicity on GM crops and organic farming to both the general public and the stakeholders. In our view the proposed deregulatory changes in favour of GM papaya are the strongest possible form of publicity the Administration can provide and the message contained therein is that GM papayas, and possibly by extention other GM foods, are safe and acceptable. The proposed promotion of GM papaya will make it difficult in future for the Administration to claim that it supports organic farming and to encourage the public and stakeholders to make organic choices. There appears to be inconsistencies and contradictions in the Administration's approach to this issue.

In the Administration's response to the Panel of Environmental Affairs overseas practice is being adduced in support of the intended move to liberalize the SAR GM papaya control regime. A number of countries and jurisdictions around the world are mentioned in which GM papayas are accepted either freely or under certain conditions. Most relevant to the Hong Kong case are neibouring jurisdictions and countries, such as Mainland China, Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia in which GM papayas are cultivated. Except for Hawaii where the first GM papayas came from, the Administration's response does not describe the extent to which GM papayas are cultivated or the scale of impacts that this may have caused in the countries mentioned. Nor is it said in the Administration's response that some of our neighbouring countries, such as Thailand, have been striving to adhere to the principle of banning the importation of GM papaya and other seeds so as to protect local seed stock and farmers.

By way of example, please see the two attached articles respectively published on 17th and 18th May 2012 by the major Thai newspaper The Nation. These two short articles show both the desirability and the difficulties of protecting native fruit seeds from GM seed importations. They also suggest that the protection of local papaya crops from GM influences may not be quite as impossible as claimed by the Administration.

The example of Canada, which accepts GM papayas on the ground that a stable local population of GM papaya has developed, may not be comparable to the Hong Kong situation to the extent that the Administration would wish to make it out to be. Hong Kong being a small place with many but small papaya gardens it may be less difficult here than in Canada to keep track of GM papayas and encourage their replacement with local species if the will to do so existed.

In the last page of the Legislative Council Brief paper the Administration's approach to GM papaya is compared to the general approach being taken to GM foods in relation to the requirement or otherwise of labelling them. Claims made by the World Health Organization to the effect that "GM food currently traded on the international market are not likely, nor have been shown, to present risks to human health", may be based on an insufficient understanding of the impacts GM food and associated toxic agrochemicals are having on the health of humans and other animals as well as the natural environment in general. The statement by the Administration that it will continue to promote the voluntary GM labelling regime instead of introducing a mandatory labelling system, appears to us to be an abdication of responsibility that infringes on the Hong Kong's consumers right to know what they buy and eat. By inaction the Administration is supporting the propagation of GM foods and the Papaya issue is a small example in the overall picture.

GLA urges a critical review of Hong Kong's approach to the acceptance of GM papayas as well as GM foods generally.

Thank you for making these comments available to the Sub-Committee.

Yours sincerely
Fabian Pedrazzini
Green Lantau Association

Genetically modified papaya found in Kanchanaburi: Chula researcher

Pongphon Sarnsamak
The Nation May 17, 2012 1:00 am

Hawaiian genetically modified papayas have been found at a farmer's plantation in Kanchanaburi province, a study revealed yesterday.

Piyasak Chaumpluk, from Chulalongkorn University's Department of Botany, who conducted the study, said the papaya in Kanchanaburi would be sent to a local fresh market, a supermarket in a department store and for export to other countries.

He presented his findings to a seminar entitled "2012 Food Security Assembly" organised by BioThai Foundation, the Sustainable Agriculture Foundation, and Alternative Agriculture Network.

Piyasak collected 319 samples of plants that may be genetically modified (GMO). Of this number, some 27 samples were cotton, 74 samples were papaya, 108 samples were rice, 105 samples were maize. The rest were chilli, tomato, and yellow bean.

According to his laboratory study, 29 samples of Hawaiian papaya in Kanchanaburi were found to the tainted with GMO and nine samples of cotton were also contaminated with GMO in Kanchanaburi and Sukhothai provinces.

Three years ago, Piyasak had found GMO contamination in maize for animal feed and cotton.

He said the GMO contamination at the plantation in Kanchanaburi might be accidental.

"Of course, the finding of GMO contamination in plants will affect the country's image and I don't want to blame the farmer for being the cause of contamination at their plantation. I think they unintentionally did it," he said.

"The GMO contaminated plants will spread to other areas," he added.

Piyasak said he had sent his report to the Department of Agriculture and asked it to strictly control GMO contamination in crop production but he had had no response from the state agency.

To date, GMO crops are not allowed in Thailand. Previously, a field trial of GMO papaya in Khon Kaen province was destroyed by a group of environmental activists after they found large-scale contamination of a neighbouring papaya farm, which resulted from field trials.

Meanwhile, a state agency had complained that experiments with genetically modified organisms were a harmful activity under Article 67 (2) of the Constitution. But this was opposed by some biotechnological experts and academics, who said many studies over the past 10 years in the US, Canada, Japan and China showed that GMO products did not cause any impact on humans and animals.

Piyasak said growing crops with GMOs should be listed as a harmful activity because they would affect human health and the environment.

"If they [biotechnological experts] think that GMOs are good and will not affect to human health, why are they afraid of listing GMOs as a harmful activity?" he said.

"The government should make a clear decision on whether we will go with genetically modified crops or alternative agriculture. But now we have learnt that we cannot control the contamination," he said.

Destroy GMO-tainted papaya crops, researcher says

PONGPHON SARNSAMAK
THE NATION May 18, 2012 1:00 am

Academics yesterday called on the Agriculture Department to destroy farms growing Hawaiian papaya in Kanchanaburi province after a recent study found that these crops might be contaminated with genetically modified organisms (GMO).

The move came after a study conducted by Piyasak Chaumpluk from Chulalongkorn University's Department of Botany revealed on Wednesday that 29 samples of Hawaiian papaya tested in Kanchanaburi province were tainted.

"Tests show that papaya grown in 50-rai in Kanchanaburi province have GMO," Piyasak said. "The department should destroy these farms in order to prevent the contamination from spreading."

Piyasak said he had all the information ready, but did not want to make any of it public as it would affect the farmers. He also called on the department to compensate farmers whose farms would be destroyed, adding the authorities should not blame the farmers for this.

"I don't think they knew that the papaya seeds were tainted with GMO," he said.

He is also calling on the department to study the route of GMO-tainted products, from farms to fresh markets or supermarkets.

"We found that pollen from GMO-tainted papaya plants could have contaminated other papaya trees," he said.

Meanwhile, Greenpeace campaign coordinator for Southeast Asia Nattawika Ewsakul said so far the government had failed to control GMO contamination.

To date, the Agriculture and Cooperatives Ministry has used the 1964 Plant Quarantine Act to control GMO contamination in papaya, corn and yellow-bean farms.

"But the question is, why does the contamination still exist?" she asked. "It is because the government's measures have not been good enough."

Nattawika added that the government should pass the bio-safety bill, the draft for which has been languishing for the past two years.

"If government does nothing to control GMO contamination, then farmers will end up having to shoulder added costs of testing their crops for GMO," she said.