

Comments from David Sanders, The Green Patch, Hong Kong

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I would like to bring to the committee's attention a worrying situation, currently taking place on Hawaiian Islands where GMO Papaya has been introduced, which could similarly become a damaging concern for growers, particularly organic growers, in Hong Kong.

Although GMO Papaya varieties are resistant to papaya ring spot virus, its acceptance for cultivation in the territory, without controls, may result in many problems now being highlighted in Hawaii by qualified concern groups carrying out scientific studies.

Of greatest concern to organic papaya growers in Hong Kong will be loss of organic status and markets if GMO Papaya contamination, whether air-borne or through seed dispersal, reach their non-GMO varieties. Without establishment of known control methods for GMO contamination, such as GMO Papaya testing and roguing out GMO plant spread, members of the emerging and dynamic organic farming community in Hong Kong, will be threatened.

The onus of testing to prove their GMO-free status falls on organic farmers and is expensive. GMO Papaya testing could be offered to farmers and gardeners either free of charge or at a nominal cost, so they can rogue out GMO Papaya contamination. This kind of support action will offer organic growers the same consideration and protection that government seeks to provide for accidental growers of GMO Papaya varieties.

Together with subsidised testing facilities, government departments, like AFCD, could consider offering further education in traditional and alternative methods of Papaya ring spot virus management, such as inter-cropping, planting vector traps, silica sprays or increasing soil fertility for plant health, together with introduction of PRSV tolerant varieties. If this action is carried out the presence and control of GMO Papaya varieties in Hong Kong should not become the serious threat that organic farmers and gardeners are now facing in Hawaii.

Finally, it should be noted that GMO Papaya varieties are still prone to severe attack by air and soil-borne pests, therefore, benefits of GM Papaya are now being questioned in all parts of the world.

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