

Tham wants tight monitoring on GMO before replanting

KOTA KINABALU: Science Adviser to the Chief Minister Datuk Tham Nyip Shen opined that each Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) variety has to go through proper monitoring and biosafety assessment before being approved for planting and commercialisation.

He said this was necessary as it was not known whether the consumption of a particular GMO product would have adverse effects on human health.

"As the state of Sabah is commencing to conduct biotechnology research to improve some of its local plant varieties to produce better quality food or to clone new breeds of animals, the regulatory issues of monitoring and enforcement of GMOs must be in place.

"This means that research leading to the production of GMOs must be conducted in a proper manner, and tested out in field trials before releasing to the environment with approval from the relevant authorities," he said.

Tham was speaking at the launch of a seminar on "Current Issues on Genetically Modified Organisms at the Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) main campus in Likas, near here Friday.

Citing a recent case where a greenpeace Chinese research team had discovered that unapproved GMO rice was being sold over the past two years and grown illegally in the Chinese province of Hubei, Tham said testing had confirmed the presence of genetically engineered DNA in 19 samples and 18 of which were confirmed as Bt Rice, a genetically engineered variety of rice to produce an inbuilt pesticide.

"Such incidents should be prevented as it is still unclear whether this rice is safe for human consumption.

"And countries suffering from GMO rice contamination will also experience market rejection," he added.

On Malaysia's context, Tham said the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation was instrumental in drafting the biosafety law which regulates the research and development, field trials, release and commercialisation of GMOs.

He said issues on GMO had been widely discussed at the national and international levels but "Malaysians are relatively new to food or products produced through genetic modifications or biotechnology".

As such, Tham urged UMS to play an important role to generate interest and promote public awareness on new frontiers, which concerns the state's well being, particularly in the area of Biotechnology. - Bernama

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