

Green signs for biotechnology-based industries in PH

Written by Mheda G. Garcia, S&T Media Service, DOST-STII
Monday, 03 December 2012 12:45

The biotech-based industry in the country may not be driving as fast but several go signals ahead are sure to keep it running into full speed.

One green sign is House Bill 844 or “An Act Promoting the Growth of Biotechnology Industry in Philippines and the Creation of Wealth from Biodiversity” filed by the AGHAM party-list.

One of the bill’s features is the establishment of the “Philippine Bioindustry R&D Center” to develop and market competitive biologically-based technologies and products. The Center also aims to harness the country’s biodiversity in developing competitive products for the world market, and to manage Biotechnology Research Fund that will support off-Center R&D and research fellowship and training program; among other functions.

According to AGHAM Representative Angelo Palmones, author of the bill, the Center shall exist as a government owned and controlled corporation or GOCC for a maximum period of 10 years, after which it shall be sold-off to the private sector. It will have a funding of P500M from the Agricultural Competitive Enhancement Fund to cover its operations for 10 years.

Another provision of the bill is the setting up of the Biotechnology Guarantee Fund amounting to P500M to provide guarantee for venture capital invested by biotechnology companies. Companies and company start-ups may also avail of incentives in the form of income tax deduction, exemption and credit, and other forms of incentives from the Board of Investments, Philippine Export Processing Zone and Barangay Micro Business Enterprise.

Palmones discussed the bill in his keynote speech on the opening of the 8th National Biotechnology Week (NBW) at the Gateway Mall in Cubao, Quezon City. The NBW featured symposiums and exhibits that promote biotechnology products developed by Filipinos for Filipinos specifically for better health of the people, and protection and conservation of the country’s environment.

With the tagline “OK ang 5K (Kalikasan, Kalusugan, Kagandahan, Kabuhayan at Kaunlaran) sa Pangkalahatan Kalusugan: Mamamayan at Kalikasan,” the celebration is spearheaded by Department of Health Secretary Enrique T. Ona in collaboration with the Departments of Science and Technology (DOST), Agriculture, Education, environment and natural resources, trade and industry, interior and local government, and Commission on Higher Education.

“We have five days to clarify with technology generators the many misconceptions about biotechnology products and gain better perspectives as to their effects to health and environment,” Palmones said.

Palmones admitted that the NBW should have been better if, along with supporters and advocates of biotech, there were also “oppositionists.” for them to get better views and understanding of the field.

Hastening the growth of PH biotech industry

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Inadequate policy environment to encourage and support bioindustry development is one major factor identified by Palmones that slows the growth of biotechnology industry in the country.

“Former DOST Secretary Dr. William Padolina has already articulated the importance of private sector participation in the development of agricultural biotechnology more than a decade ago,” he said.

According to Padolina, sustainability of biotechnology R&D activities can only be assured if they are able to serve commercial purposes, and which may form the beginnings of an agricultural biotechnology industry and the much-needed commercial base for modern biotechnology to take-off in the country.

The youth write about biotech

Another highlight of this year’s NBW is the participation of young people through the Biotech Campus Journalism Contest. High school and college student-writers from both private and public schools nationwide submitted feature articles on the topic Benefits and potentials of modern crop biotechnology in the Philippines.”

In the college level, Eddie Dulpina of Our Lady of Fatima University bagged first place, followed by Dia Marmi Bazar of Misamis University at second place, and Mark Anthony Daza Toldo of University of Sto. Tomas at third.

In the high school level, Joelle Mae Garcia of Pasig City Science High School topped the aspiring biotech scribes, followed by Jeremy John Magpantay of De La Salle University’s Science and Technology Complex at second place, then Regiem-Melech Ocampo of Adventist University of the Philippines Academy at third.

Winners and finalists were awarded during the opening day of 2012 NBW.

The contest was organized by the Philippine Science Journalists Association Inc., AGHAM Party List, International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications, and Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture.

“I believe that with the youth as advocates we can look forward for stronger support to the country’s effort in advancing the cause of biotechnology,” said AGHAM Party-List Rep. Palmones.

On exhibit were research and development (R&D) products on environment, health, agriculture and topics such as, milestones of biotechnology, country’s biotech and safety regulations, winning entries of last year’s NBW “BiotechTOONS Contest” on benefits and potentials of crop biotechnology, and the like.

Among those on display at the booths were DOST’s priority projects on biotechnology and genomics such as, clean-up agents of mining wastewater; fermentation technology for ethanol production; reactor to treat highly-polluted water of small and medium enterprises; plant-based wood preservative; diagnostic kits to detect white spot virus in shrimps and harmful

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contaminants in meat; radiation technologies and tissue culture in plant breeding; interactive genome library for influenza virus; diagnostic kit to detect dengue virus; among other projects for industry, health and agriculture sectors.

Notes:

AGHAM is a non-stock, non-profit association of science professionals, science journalists, advocates and supporters that seeks to push S&T as effective tools for economic development.

For more details on House Bill 844, please access the website www.agham.org.ph.