

## Ifugao rice terraces are GMO-free—officials

Province prefers organic farming

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BANAUE, Ifugao--The Ifugao province has declared itself free from genetically modified organisms (GMO), officials said Tuesday.

Encouraging organic farming, Gov. Teddy Baguilat, Jr., Mayor Lino Madchiw, Greenpeace campaigner for Southeast Asia Daniel Ocampo and Cathy Untalan, executive director of Miss Earth Foundation, unveiled a GMO-free marker at the Dianara Viewpoint here.

“The Genetically Modified Organism (GMO)-free campaign should be a national campaign. If we influence our neighboring provinces where rice production is large, then that would be a positive impact,” said Baguilat.

“GMO rice threatens the way of life of the Ifugaos. Hybrid varieties of rice are harvested faster than the Tinawon variety. Usually, the rice cycle from planting to harvest season takes six to seven months. If there’s GMO, then it would break the cycle and the activities that the natives used to do,” added Baguilat.

In an interview with INQUIRER.net, Baguilat said the government should make the traditional rice farming system commercially and economically viable.

“If Tinawon rice becomes the cash crop, mas lalo pang pananatilihin ng mga Ifugaos ang [then the Ifugaos will support the] Tinawon variety because it’s a cash crop. We’re now selling it overseas in the United States,” said Baguilat.

Meanwhile, Ocampo said local farmers could not afford GMO seeds since these are owned and patented by companies.

Ocampo told INQUIRER.net that promoting indigenous rice varieties and protecting the Philippines’ rice diversity were among the objectives of their campaign to declare the province GMO-free.

Apart from Ifugao, other areas declared as GMO-free zones include Bohol, Oriental Mindoro, Palawan and Marinduque, Ocampo said.

“The campaign will continue as long as the government commercializes genetically modified rice,” said Ocampo.

Prior to the unveiling of the GMO-free marker at the Dianara Viewpoint, three mumbaki or local medicine men performed an “Alim,” a tribal ritual to ask for blessings.

The mumbakis chanted and offered animals, which started Monday evening to Tuesday morning.