

CropLife salutes female legends of R&D



iPhilippines recently concluded the 18th National Biotechnology Week with the theme “Responding to the Challenges: Business Opportunity in Biotechnology” held at the Philippine Trade Training Center.

The event, held from November 23-27, underscored the benefits of biotechnology in solving some of the major issues that the country is facing, including food security and health amid the pandemic.

Throughout the event, important topics on food security were discussed such as the environmental impact of biotechnology crops, gene editing and climate smart crops, biotechnology applications that contribute to resilience and sustainable agriculture, agri-aqua biotechnology, keeping food safe from contaminants, as well as biotechnology impact on the fisheries sector.

Biotechnology’s implications on health care were also highlighted such as its contributions in the face of COVID-19, biotechnology management for COVID-19 laboratories, biotechnology for a healthy environment, mosquito-borne diseases and the use of modern biotechnology, and vaccine research and development as well as the process of approval.

In line with the government's thrust to encourage more science graduates to work locally, the event also focused on career opportunities available in the field of biotechnology.

This year's National Biotechnology Week was jointly held by the Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Agriculture, Department of Education, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Interior and Local Government, Department of Science and Technology and the Commission on Higher Education.

CropLife is one in celebrating the outstanding contributions of women researchers in the field of agriculture which have made an enormous impact in the field of biotechnology.

Among them is Dr. Desiree M. Hautea of the Institute of Plant Breeding of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB). Dr. Hautea, who is the project leader of the Bt Eggplant Project was recognized in 2021 by the Asian Scientist Magazine as one of Asia's top scientists. Apart from her effective leadership of the landmark project, her research resulted in the first-ever publicly available data on the field efficacy of the Bt eggplant and its potential impact on non-target organisms. She also conducted extensive research on the first public-sector eggplant hybrids in the Philippines. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she helped establish the UPLB COVID-19 Molecular and Diagnostic Laboratory testing facility.

When it comes to imparting knowledge, Dr. Nilda Burgos, a professor in Weed Science and Weed Physiology at the University of Arkansas, does not let distance keep her from sharing her expertise with her kababayans. Dr. Burgos, who was invited by CropLife several times to conduct online lectures on the latest technological advances in weed science, readily explained concepts and trends in weed management in a manner that brought science and practical application together.

Another legend in the field of biotechnology is Dr. Saturnina Halos, one of the pioneers in developing and overseeing the Department of Agriculture's policies and programs in biotech through her role as Biotechnology Advisory Team chairperson. It is thanks to Dr. Halos that GM crops have a comprehensive regulatory policy that ensures the safety of farmers and consumers in all stages. Apart from biotechnology, Dr. Halos also contributed to the drafting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997. She has also published over 80 scientific articles in biotechnology books and journals following her extensive research on the subject matter.

"Our female colleagues are known legends in the field of science and every day their work continues to make an impact in Philippine agriculture. Their passion to conduct research towards the advancement of science, and their drive to share their knowledge with the most number of people is truly astounding and admirable. We salute you, and we salute all women who are contributing to the field of agriculture," CropLife Philippines Executive Director Ramon Abadilla said.