

## **Information and Biotechnology: Partners in Progress<sup>1</sup>**

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Let me start by extending my congratulations to the people of SEARCA for the website launching of the Biotechnology Information Center. Also, my appreciation goes to all the people gathered here today for the dedication you have shown and the effort you have exerted in popularizing biotechnology in the Philippines.

Cognizant of biotechnology's potential in attaining global competitiveness and sustainable growth for the Philippines as well as the country's comparative strengths in biotechnology research, biotechnology has been in the agenda of the Department of Science and Technology since it was elevated to a cabinet level in 1987.

In fact, one of our agencies, the Philippine Council for Advanced Science and Technology Research and Development (PCASTRD) as the sectoral planning council for the advanced S&T sector, has managed and implemented a biotechnology sectoral plan. The plan identifies priority programs and projects in research and development (R&D), human resource development, infrastructure building, and technology transfer, biotechnology research was undertaken and supported in various areas of application such as agriculture, food processing, health and medicine, industry, and environmental management. DOST councils, government R&D institutes, academic institutions, and private organizations collaborate in undertakings consistent with the biotechnology sectoral plan.

Alongside with the implementation of the plan is the conduct of an information dissemination and advocacy program aimed at promoting popular understanding and appreciation of biotechnology.

The need to educate our people cannot be overemphasized. Various stakeholders from the academe, government, and the civil society need to understand and appreciate the potentials, applications, and implications of biotechnology. By making our people fully aware of its features and prospects, thereby making them appreciate its significance, we would be able to fully harness the benefits of biotechnology.

The department, through its sectoral councils like PCASTRD and the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD), has been working closely with our biotechnology experts to generate the critical support of various stakeholders, including policy and decision-makers in government, business and industry, non-government organizations, and the public in general. PCASTRD, for instance, has been conducting regional seminars/workshops on biotechnology since 199; the same have been conducted for our legislators and their technical staff at the House of Representatives and the Senate.

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Both PCASTRD and PCARRD have actually developed information materials on biotechnology such as primers, komiks, and audio-visual materials. Complementing these initiatives, we have also grabbed opportunities to exhibit local developments in biotechnology for various audiences such as legislators, students, faculty members, businessmen, and the general public. The use of the tri-media: print, radio and television, has been explored to inform the public. PCARRD also coordinated with PTV-4 for the airing and discussion of biotechnology issues and concerns in its program, "Dighay Bayan."

To date, information and communications technology tools are being harnessed to ensure widespread use and dissemination of biotechnology information. Databases on biotechnology experts and completed researches in the country from 1980-1995 have been developed by PCASTRD. PCARRD, on the other hand, has developed a website on Philippine Agricultural Biotechnology.

In an effort to harmonize and optimize available resources for biotechnology programs and projects including information and advocacy, the DOST through its agencies has been coordinating with an inter-agency task force on biotechnology since last year. The task force which is composed of representatives from DOST's sectoral councils, S&T advisory/collegial bodies and key R&D institutions, was organized to formulate guidelines, recommendations, and strategies to fully harness the potentials of biotechnology.

The task force has likewise agreed to develop a Philippine biotechnology website to be coordinated and managed by PCASTRD, with the support of various public stakeholder institutions. The Philippine biotechnology website is envisioned to serve as an accurate, credible, and up-to-date online source of information on local biotechnology developments, capabilities, activities/initiatives, and policies, among others. This shall be achieved by integrating/linking websites of official sources of information like the DOST councils and other institutions like IPB, Biotech, PhilRice, etc. Other information dissemination activities and strategies have been discussed and agreed upon. SEQARCAs, through its Biotechnology Information Center has agreed to collaborate with us in these undertakings.

We welcome SEARCA's move to establish a biotechnology information resource for the Southeast Asian region as this is a fitting complement to all our efforts. We have found an active partner and ally in this formidable yet challenging task of creating awareness, interest, and support to biotechnology.

All these initiatives, coupled with your dedication, would serve the good purpose of leading our country to the threshold of progress.

Again, my congratulations to you and *MABUHAY TAYONG LAHAT!*