

How much science do Nobel Prize laureates need to take a position?

Campaign for the introduction of Golden Rice gets prominent support

30 June 2016 The campaign for the introduction of genetically engineered so-called “Golden Rice” has gained prominent support. After the proponents of this rice attempted to get the blessing of the pope and claimed that environmental organisations are responsible for the deaths of millions of people, they are now trying to use the reputation of Nobel Prize laureates for their own ends. A letter slamming the environmental organisation Greenpeace for its critical stand on genetically engineered plants has gained support from more than 100 Nobel Prize laureates. However, a closer look reveals that this initiative does not seem to be worthy of winning a prize.

So-called “Golden Rice” is genetically engineered to produce carotene, which gives a yellow colouring to the kernels. The rice is supposedly meant to combat Vitamin A deficiency, which is a severe problem in some developing countries. The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is currently examining the nutritional quality of the rice that was produced with the help of the Swiss company Syngenta more than ten years ago.

The Nobel Prize laureates are more or less using the same arguments as those used in the “Golden Rice” campaign, which also harshly criticised Greenpeace. It appears though that the laureates have failed to double check these arguments against the latest scientific findings: As posted on the IRRI website, there is still a basic lack of data needed to make a judgement on the nutritional quality of the rice. There is also a lack of data on risk assessment.

“We would naturally expect that Nobel Prize laureates would first wait for the data before taking a position on this issue,” Christoph Then says for Testbiotech. “It is also seriously concerning that they are trying to give the impression that genetically engineered plants are all safe. Meanwhile, the industry has admitted that the methods used to produce plants such as “Golden Rice” are outdated and lack predictability.”

Testbiotech believes that it is not sufficient to rely on published studies claiming that genetically engineered plants do not pose any risks. On the contrary, it has to be emphasised that many relevant risks have never been investigated. Just recently, Testbiotech published a report showing major gaps in the current risk assessment of genetically engineered plants.

Further information: [The initiative of the Nobel Prize winners](#) [1]

[The claims of the Golden Rice campaign](#) [2]

[The Pope meets the Golden Rice campaign](#) [3]

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[Testbiotech report on problems with the Golden Rice project](#) [5]

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