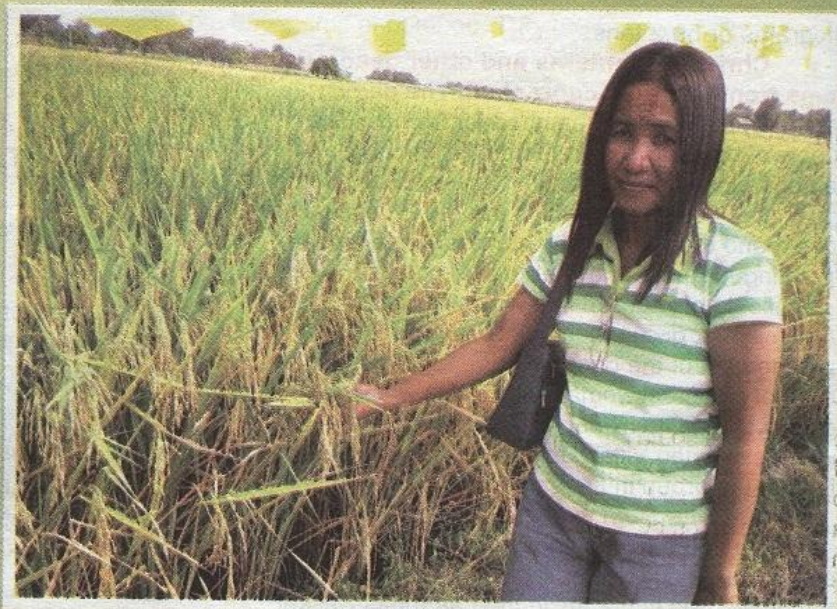


Hybrid Rice Is a Money-Maker



Emily Gagilonia and a stand of hybrid rice

MORE AND MORE FARMERS are discovering that hybrid rice is really a money-maker. These include small scale farmers who plant only small areas as well as large scale growers.

For four days starting last April 15, we had a chance to talk to hybrid rice growers in Nueva Ecija, Pangasinan and Tarlac. We attended a meeting in Brgy. Bical, Muñoz City, where experts of a seed company discussed the fine points of hybrid rice production. The meeting was attended by more than 30 farmers, many of them women. Oh yes, many hybrid rice growers are women because their husbands are either employed or are busy with other activities in the farm.

One attendee was Emily Gagilonia, 47, whose engineer husband is employed in a cable company. Emily is a hands-on hybrid rice farmer who is planting

1.4 hectares to hybrid rice two times a year. For two years now, she has been planting hybrid rice but she thinks there are still other technologies to learn so she keeps on attending seminars and farm visits.



BY
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Emily, by the way, used to be an overseas Filipino worker (OFW) for three years in Hong Kong as a household help. At the same time, her husband was also an OFW in Saudi Arabia. She came back

to the Philippines in 1986 while her husband returned a year later. By that time they were able to save enough to buy a 2.5-hectare farm and to put up their own house.

While her husband sought employment in the

Philippines, Emily has been devoting her time to farming. She is the farmer in the family. She related that last December 22, she planted Jollirice, one of the latest hybrid varieties, on 4,500 square meters. The harvest was really high. She harvested 112 cavans of *palay*, each cavan weighing 51 kilos.

Some of the *palay* were used as payment for the harvesters. The rest, however, were immediately sold to a trader at ₱14.50 per kilo on a wet basis, meaning newly threshed. Emily was able to gross ₱76,908 from the *palay* she sold. According to her record (she has a record of expenses and income), she spent a total of ₱16,466 for the cost of seeds, land preparation, planting, fertilizers, diesel for irrigation, harvesting, threshing and herbicide. That means she had a net of ₱60,022 from that 4,500 square meters of land.

She explained that the yield of that 4,500 square meters was more than the usual yield of conventional varieties (inbreds) grown on one hectare.

Because of the high-yield potential of hybrid rice, many big seed companies have gone into hybrid rice seed production. There are at least 10 big seed companies, some of them new, in the business. These include SL Agritech, Bayer, Bioseed, Syngenta, Pioneer Hi-Bred, Allied Botanical Corporation, PhilScott, DevGen, US Agri and Dhanya Seeds. As they say, the future is Hybrid.

While there are more and more farmers adopting hybrid rice technology, there's still a lot of work to do. The most important thing to do is to disseminate the right technologies to the farmers so that they can maximize

the potentials of hybrid seeds.

Estrella Hidalgo, a senior agriculturist of Bioseed Research Philippines, explains that there are different hybrid varieties being offered by the different companies. These don't have the same characteristics so that one cannot just generalize the recommended cultural practices. The technicians of each company, therefore, will have to take a lot of effort to explain to the farmers the right techniques for their particular varieties.


But there are practices that are common to all the hybrids. For instance, the farmers have to be convinced that they only have to plant one seedling per hill instead of the usual practice of planting three to four seedlings per hill of the so-called inbreds or nonhybrids. Of course, the easiest way to convince the farmers to follow the one-seedling-per hill mode is to show them the result of actual plantings by farmers who have been sold to the hybrid rice protocol. And that is the reason why many of the seed companies are conducting farm visits, harvest festivals and similar promotional activities.

According to Mrs. Hidalgo, it is also very important to educate the farmers about the right fertilizers to apply at the right time and at the right amount. The farmers have to get rid of some of their unscientific practices. For instance, it has been observed that many farmers apply nothing but urea to their rice plants, applying as much as 15 bags per hectare. Because of too much nitrogen, the rice plants will not produce the desired amount of grains. In addition, the excessive application of nitrogen results in highly acidic soil that is detrimental to the growth of the rice plants.

The application of urea during the fruiting stage of the rice plants may give rise to new tillers which will produce grains that may not be mature when most of the panicles

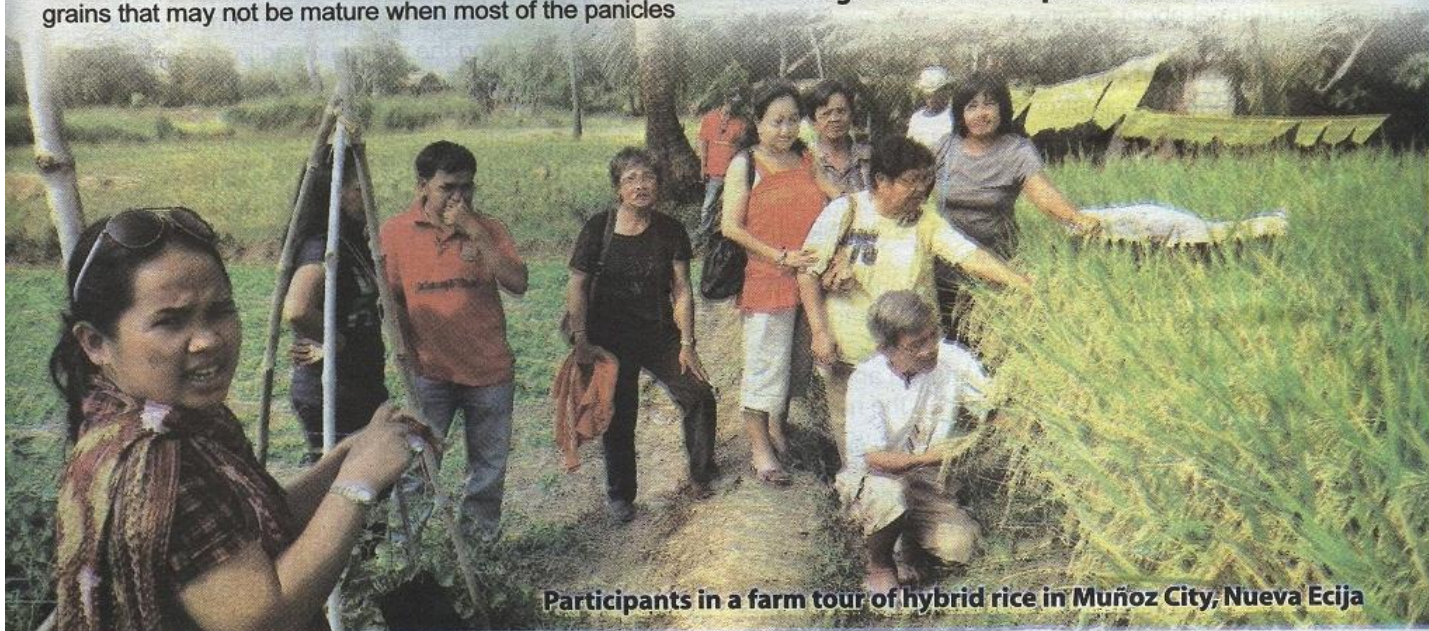
are due for harvesting. This could result in immature grains that are mixed with the fully mature grains, resulting in broken rice at milling time.

Proper water management is another aspect that has to be given enough attention. Jollirice, in particular, says Mrs. Hidalgo, loves intermittent drying and flooding of the soil. That way, more tillers will develop during the early stage of development of the plants. As many as 30 tillers could develop from the single seedling if there is proper water management in the field. Of course, that will result in more panicles per hill.

All in all, the potential of hybrid rice for achieving much higher yields is great. However, more demo farms, more farmers' training, more harvest festivals, more farm tours are needed. Above all, the support of the local governments and the Department of Agriculture will go a long way in promoting the production of hybrid rice. 



Elvis Iligan of Bioseed and Emily Gagilonia examine panicles of Jollirice.



Participants in a farm tour of hybrid rice in Muñoz City, Nueva Ecija