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PhilippinesÂ to launch new world-class agri genomics center in partnership with KOICA and IRRI

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The University of the Philippines Los BaÃ±os (UPLB), the South Korean government through the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) are set to construct an on-campus agricultural genomics research facility to advance genome-based agriculture research and development capabilities in the country.

The new UPLB Agricultural Genomics Research Center (AGRC) is part of a six-year collaborative venture with KOICA which involves the joint conduct of capacity building activities to strengthen academic partnerships between UPLB and Korean universities, and in turn, improve the countryâ??s agricultural research competitiveness through the acceleration of agricultural science and technology collaborations and other innovative services.

â??The establishment of AGRC has a primary goal of a collaboration to initiate scientific cooperation between IRRI, the UP System, and South Korea through KOICA. As we lay the foundation of AGRC today, may it become a beacon for scientific progress and sustainability not only in the Southeast Asian region but also throughout the world,â? said UPLB Chancellor Jose V. Camacho during his welcome remarks.

The collaboration includes opportunities to earn doctoral degrees from Korean universities and an MS sandwich research program at IRRI targeting incoming and continuing qualified Filipino MS students enrolled at UPLB. As the technical partner for the project, IRRI has also developed ten advanced agricultural science internship programs and provides proper guidance on the application of genomics tools in real world plant breeding programs and will supervise and support program scholars to conduct high impact-research within the facilityâ??s new laboratories and existing facilities in IRRI.

â??This facility is but one of the many steps that we will be taking together as we endeavor to develop more sustainable and efficient agricultural practices for farming communities all over the world. Ultimately, we hope that this space can foster scholars who can help farmers worldwideÂ improve their competitiveness and productivity amidst global challengesâ? said IRRI Interim Director General, Dr. Ajay Kohli.

Ahead of the construction of the actual facility, the capability enhancement and academic partnerships component of the program has benefitted more than 1,800 participants. In addition to providing seed funding, the Republic of Korea, through KOICA, will continue to dispatch experts to provide additional technical advice and assist in finalizing the center's operational plans and training.

â??With the support of IRRI, which has extensive technical experience on agricultural R&D, this project promises a strengthened science and technology adaptation in agriculture. KOICA strongly believes that today's collaboration will also contribute to the countryâ??s agricultural competitiveness and improving food security in the Philippines,â? said KOICA Vice President, Hon. Lee Yun Young.

The Ambassador of Korea to the Philippines, Hon. Lee Sang Hwa noted in his speech that the groundbreaking event is a testament not only of the close partnership between Korea and the Philippines in the fields of agriculture and innovation, but also a significant move toward addressing food security, poverty and rural community development in the Philippines.

For his part, UP President Atty. Angelo Jimenez, emphasized that science and research should be of service to the Filipino people and that the upcoming AGRC is a testament to that.

Once completed, the AGRC will provide an environment which will complement the mission of the country in training and providing growth opportunities to scientists, collaborators, and partners while embracing diversity and inclusivity.