

Book tells how golden apple snails turned rice pest; bares effective management

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Friday, 10 November 2006
Last Updated Thursday, 19 April 2007

Find out how a "miracle" creature became a nuisance to rice farmers through the book titled, *Global Advances in the Ecology and Management of Golden Apple Snails (GAS)*.

Launched on Nov. 14 at SEARCA Auditorium in Los Baños, Laguna, the book was edited by Dr. Ravindra C. Joshi and Dr. Leocadio S. Sebastian, executive director of Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice).

The GAS, also known as golden miracle snail and golden kuhol, was introduced in Asia during the 1980s as supplement to the low-protein diet of the rural poor.

From South America, it was introduced to Taiwan as food source owing to its high protein content. It is also a good source of carbohydrates, sodium, riboflavin, niacin and iodine.

GAS derived its name from the golden delicious apple (a yellow to yellow-green apple with sweet, juicy, crisp flesh) owing to their likeness in color. Attracted to its color, the Taiwanese reared GAS in aquariums for display and cleaning fish's tanks as it feeds on aquarium scum.

However, as snails were produced for consumption and aquarium pet, they escaped into waterways and rapidly spread to Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Hong Kong, southern China, Japan, and the Philippines.

With only a few natural enemies to control them, the snails rapidly developed into a serious pest in Asia's rice areas. Their fast growth and reproduction - females lay egg masses to a maximum of 500 eggs a week - leads to population levels that can destroy entire rice crop. In the Philippines, reported crop losses owing to GAS reached US\$ 1 billion.

This is an alarming statistics for rice farmers, technicians, and extension workers. Researchers around the globe hope that the book can help them manage this pest. The book discusses the ecology and management of GAS, snail taxonomy (traditional and molecular tools), impacts of GAS on aquatic ecosystems and farmers' health, and pesticide abuse/misuse.

Some chapters also tackle its utilization as food and natural paddy weeder. GAS recipes from the Philippines, People's Republic of China, Cambodia, Republic of Korea, Indonesia, and Myanmar were also included.

"This book compiled fragmented and scattered information on GAS," said Robert S. Zeigler, director general of the International Rice Research institute.

The book is published by PhilRice, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and DICTUC.

The book will be sold at US\$52, developing countries other than the Philippines; and US\$102, developed countries.

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