

New East-West Seed facility set to drive innovation in hybrid crop development

21 May 2025 | News

Beyond developing disease-resistant vegetables, East-West Seed (EWS) Philippines stands out for its unwavering commitment to putting farmers at the heart of everything it does—guided by the belief that planting seeds of goodness today will yield greater benefits for communities tomorrow



Beyond developing disease-resistant vegetables, East-West Seed (EWS) Philippines stands out for its unwavering commitment to putting farmers at the heart of everything it does—guided by the belief that planting seeds of goodness today will yield greater benefits for communities tomorrow

This vision was clearly reflected when East-West Seed (EWS) inaugurated its new 36-hectare Hortanova Research Center in San Juan, Batangas. During the inauguration ceremony, EWS CEO Jean-Christophe Filippi emphasized that this milestone marks not only the company's dedication to innovation and excellence, but more importantly, its enduring commitment to farmers—who remain the backbone of EWS's success.

“East-West Seed has always been a company driven by innovation. Our mission is simple yet profound: to empower farmers by providing them with the best vegetable seeds—seeds capable of withstanding the challenges of a changing climate, improving yields, and most importantly, securing farmers' livelihoods,” said EWS CEO Jean-Christophe Filippi during the inauguration.

Filippi further emphasized that the Hortanova Research Center is more than just a research investment—it's a long-term commitment to the future of Philippine agriculture.

According to Ruby Samonte, Country Head of Research and Development at East-West Seed (EWS), the decision to build the Hortanova Research Center in a rice-based area was intentional. She explained that doing so allows the company to develop climate-resilient vegetable varieties that are well-suited to local growing conditions.

“This location can serve as a bridge for rice farmers—who make up the majority in this region—to explore vegetable farming as a viable alternative,” Samonte said. While the facility is based in San Juan, Batangas, she emphasized that its benefits will not be limited to the local community. “Breeding in this type of environment opens opportunities across the Philippines for rice farmers to diversify their crop cycles with adaptable vegetable varieties,” she added.

Samonte underscored that the key outcome of this facility will be the development of innovative products with superior traits—prioritizing disease resistance, climate adaptability, and ultimately, higher yields. “Most importantly, higher yields mean increased income for smallholder farmers, which directly supports their livelihoods,” she said.

She also highlighted the importance of seed accessibility and affordability, which she sees as critical in enabling more farmers to transition into vegetable farming and become agri-entrepreneurs.

Adding to this, Henk Hermans, EWS General Manager for the Philippines, praised the new facility, describing it as a “beautiful location” with greater capacity for testing and breeding. “This new space gives us everything we need to do the work that matters—developing the next generation of vegetable varieties that are truly farmer-first,” Hermans said.

With the expanded space at the Hortanova Research Center, Hermans noted that the team now has the capacity to work more systematically across a wide range of crops and products. This structured approach, he explained, enables more accurate data collection, which in turn significantly enhances EWS’s breeding capabilities.

“It’s a major investment for the company,” Hermans said. “So we expect to see a wave of new vegetable varieties—not just for the Philippines, but also for other markets.”

Hermans shared that East-West Seed, which began its journey in the Philippines over 43 years ago, has since grown into a global player. Today, the company is actively involved in Africa and Latin America, with many of the vegetables cultivated in those regions being bred right here in the Philippines.

While farmers remain at the heart of EWS’s mission, Hermans emphasized that the company also pays close attention to vegetable consumers, constantly monitoring emerging trends to develop products that are both appealing and relevant to modern diets. “Through this, we also aim to increase vegetable consumption in the Philippines,” he added.

Hermans also acknowledged the vital role of traders and financiers in the agricultural ecosystem. These partners not only support farmers with access to capital but also help ensure that products are optimized—easy to handle, market-ready, and attractive as investments.

Hermans emphasized that the success of the Hortanova Research Center will depend not only on the physical facility, but also on the expertise of the people and the methodologies they apply throughout the breeding process. He explained that the hybridization of vegetable varieties is a meticulous and time-intensive effort, often taking up to 10 years before a new product reaches the market.

“We have certain methods here, both in Lipa and at this new location, that help us significantly shorten that timeline,” Hermans said. Speeding up the breeding process is essential, he noted, to stay aligned with the rapid pace of market demands and emerging consumer trends.

Among the next-generation hybrids showcased during the inauguration were Suprema Gold, a squash variety with intermediate resistance to Squash Leaf Curl Philippines Virus (SLCPV); Datu F1, a hybrid sweet corn variety; and Galante Todo, a promising string bean variant.

Maria Venus Bautista, Crop Breeding Manager at East-West Seed, highlighted that their breeding program follows a market-driven approach, carefully considering the real-world challenges farmers face. She cited Suprema Gold as a prime example, developed in response to the widespread prevalence of SLCPV, a major constraint in squash production in the Philippines.

“Because of this resistance, we were able to increase production by 30 per cent,” Bautista said, underscoring how targeted breeding solutions can significantly improve farmers’ productivity and resilience.