

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

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News Release

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USDA Announces Close and Findings of Investigation into the Detection of Genetically Engineered Wheat in Oregon in 2013

Opens New Investigation Into Separate Detection of GE Wheat in Montana in 2014

WASHINGTON, Sept. 26, 2014— After conducting a thorough and scientifically detailed investigation into the detection last year of genetically engineered (GE) wheat growing in a single field on a single farm in Oregon, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has concluded that the presence of the GE wheat appears to be an isolated incident. The GE wheat found on the Oregon farm was developed by Monsanto to be resistant to the herbicide glyphosate, also known as Roundup.

APHIS closed the investigation after exhausting all leads. The agency also found no evidence of GE wheat in commerce. APHIS is releasing today its findings and full report of investigation and evidence file, with appropriate personal information and confidential business information redacted.

Additionally, APHIS has opened a new investigation into a regulatory compliance issue involving GE wheat found growing at a research facility that was the previous site of authorized field trials in Montana. GE wheat was field-tested under APHIS' regulatory approval at the Montana State University's Southern Agricultural Research Center (SARC) in Huntley, Montana, between 2000 and 2003. Genetic testing shows that the GE wheat at this research facility location is significantly different from the GE wheat found growing at the Oregon farm last year.

APHIS has not deregulated any GE wheat varieties to date, and thus, there are no GE wheat varieties for sale or in commercial production in the United States. Additionally, the genetic trait detected in the wheat in these two instances does not present a food safety issue because FDA completed a food safety consultation for this GE wheat in 2004 and expressed no food safety concerns.

Oregon Investigation

APHIS began its comprehensive investigation into the detection of GE wheat on the Oregon farm on May 3, 2013. During the following 10 months, APHIS conducted 291 interviews with wheat growers, grain elevator operators, crop consultants, and wheat researchers, and collected and carefully reviewed thousands of pages of evidence. Additionally, APHIS collected more than 100 samples from businesses that sold and purchased the same certified seed planted in the field in Oregon, as well as from businesses that purchased the harvested grain from the grower.

The investigation indicates that this appears to be an isolated occurrence and that there is no evidence of any GE wheat in commerce. Information collected during the investigation was instrumental in providing critical information to trading partners to keep foreign wheat markets open. After exhausting all leads, APHIS was unable to determine exactly how the GE wheat came to grow in the farmer's field.

The investigation also found that the GE wheat is not a commercial variety of wheat. Instead, the genetic characteristics of the GE wheat volunteers are representative of a wheat breeding program.

A copy of the 12,842 pages that comprise the complete report of investigation and evidence file that has been redacted for personal information and confidential business information is available on the APHIS website at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/foia/efoia.php.

Montana Investigation

On July 14, 2014, APHIS was notified that suspected GE wheat had been discovered growing at the Montana State University's Southern Agricultural Research Center (SARC) in Huntley, Montana, where Monsanto and researchers grew GE wheat as part of field trials between 2000 and 2003. These field tests were conducted under APHIS' regulatory approval.

APHIS immediately began an investigation into this regulatory compliance issue and sampled wheat at the SARC. Testing of the samples by a USDA laboratory confirmed that the wheat is genetically engineered to resist Roundup. Further genetic testing shows that the GE wheat collected from the field in Montana was not the source of the GE wheat found growing in the single field in Oregon.

Among other things, APHIS' ongoing investigation is focusing on why GE wheat was found growing at the research facility location. GE wheat from the facility has not been allowed to enter commercial channels this year and GE wheat grown as part of authorized field trials at this research facility between 2000 and 2003 was likewise not allowed to enter commercial channels. None of the wheat is sold as seed. APHIS will provide more information when it concludes its investigation.

Next Steps

As it continues its investigation in Montana, APHIS is also taking several additional steps to ensure that unintended GE wheat is not growing in other locations in the United States where field trials are taking place or have recently occurred. APHIS will inspect field trials planted in 2014, and follow-up with post-harvest inspections to ensure those conducting the field trials adhere to APHIS' requirements to monitor for, and remove, volunteer plants (plants that grow in a field following a previous harvest). It will also conduct some post-harvest volunteer monitoring inspections of GE wheat field trials that were planted in 2012 and 2013. Beyond this, APHIS is assessing other measures – such as the requirements it puts in place for field tests involving GE wheat, as well as the frequency of its inspections of field test sites – to minimize the potential for any further incidents involving GE wheat.

--Questions and Answers

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