

USDA Provides Update for Farmers on Genetically Engineered Rice

Independent testing by the Arkansas Rice Board in January indicated the presence of genetically engineered (GE) material in non-GE Clearfield 131 (CL131) rice. As a result, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service conducted its own CL131 testing, which detected trace levels of LLRICE62 in CL131 2004 headrow seed. LLRICE62 is a line of GE rice developed by Bayer Crop Science.

The tests were conducted as part of an ongoing investigation into the release of regulated LLRICE601 in commercial long-grain rice. Since LLRICE62 was deregulated by APHIS in 1999, this rice line is not the focus of APHIS' investigation. APHIS conducted the testing to determine which GE rice variety, if any, was present in CL131. The positive sample was pulled from 2004 headrow seed--an early step in the plant breeding process--and not from foundation seed.

A full investigation continues in order to determine the circumstances surrounding the release of LLRICE601 and whether any USDA regulations were violated. Each step in the investigation or other external events may result in the need for further investigative work.

It is APHIS policy not to disclose the findings of an ongoing inquiry until the full investigation is complete. However, this peripheral information is being made available now to assist farmers in making decisions in preparation for the 2007 planting season and to inform trading partners as part of the agency's commitment to transparency.

On July 31, 2006, Bayer CropScience notified USDA and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration that the company had detected trace amounts of regulated LLRICE601 in commercial long-grain rice. In November 2006, APHIS announced that 2003 Cheniere variety was the only foundation seed that tested positive for regulated GE LLRICE601. APHIS also announced that a sample of the 2003 Cheniere variety indicated the presence of trace levels of unregulated LLRICE62.

LLRICE62, LLRICE06 and LLRICE601 are rice varieties engineered by Bayer to be tolerant to herbicides marketed under the brand name LibertyLink. APHIS deregulated LLRICE62 and LLRICE06 in 1999 after thorough safety evaluations and on Nov. 24, 2006, after additional evaluation extended its deregulation from the original two lines to include LLRICE601. Deregulation, or regulatory approval of a particular product, is handled separately from determinations of compliance with APHIS regulations, and does not affect the ongoing investigation.

USDA and FDA have thoroughly evaluated all three varieties of rice and determined that they present no human health, food safety or environmental concerns. The protein found in LibertyLink rice is also approved for use in other products and has been scientifically reviewed and approved for use in a dozen countries around the world.

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