

Genetically Modified (GM) Rice and Biotechnology News

The U.S. Rice Industry is to be commended in its effort to clean up the Liberty Link GM rice contamination event. Testing has indicated success in the cleanup of foundation seed lots, though it remains to be seen if the industry can completely purge the contamination from the system. It's disappointing that the owner of the Liberty Link trait did not exercise corporate responsibility but instead washed its hands of the problem, and left the cost of the cleanup to be borne entirely by the rice industry.

The California Rice Commission is to be commended for unanimously supporting a 2007 moratorium resolution on all open-air genetically engineered rice field trials. This action came on the heels of the release of the RPC-commissioned report, 'Market Acceptance of U.S. Genetically Modified Herbicide Tolerant Rice'.

However, the AB 2622 (Assembly Bill 2622-California Rice Certification Act) committee has thus far paid little heed of the resolution as it conducts its work. Twice since the CRC Board passed its moratorium resolution, the AB 2622 Committee has approved open-air GM field trials. The most recent approval in January 2008 allows GM production by Arcadia Biosciences in the Central Valley. The California Rice Industry simply cannot risk a contamination event, which would devastate our export markets, and yet the AB 2622 Committee continues to approve GM planting protocols.

There has been a lot of news surrounding biotechnology the past few months. Below we summarize some of those stories:

- **October 2007:** The USDA APHIS investigation results were reported on the contamination of the commercial rice supply by genetically engineered rice (LL 601) developed by Bayer CropSciences. APHIS was unable to hold Bayer accountable for seven infractions of APHIS requirements because the 5-year statute of limitations had expired. The current APHIS recordkeeping and related regulatory requirements did not provide investigators the tools they needed to reconstruct the complete picture of what caused the episode.
- **November 2007:** Dr. E Neal, a Research Associate of Department of Agricultural Environmental and Development Economics at Ohio State University, released a study that calculated a loss of \$1.2 Billion Dollars to the U.S. Rice Industry due to the Liberty Link 601 GM rice contamination event.
- **January 2008:** The AB 2622 Committee approved a change in the protocol for Arcadia Biosciences that will allow them to move north and conduct field trials for their GM rice varieties in Fresno County. Last year Arcadia was required to plant their varieties in Imperial and Riverside Counties. Recall that the Liberty Link contamination in the South occurred because of small experimental field trials.
- **January 2008:** Assembly Bill 541, which could become California's first state law protecting farmers from the hazards of genetically engineered crops, passed the Assembly Agriculture Committee and the Assembly. The major elements of the bill are protection from patent infringement lawsuits for farmers unknowingly contaminated by GM crops and the establishment of a mandatory crop sampling protocol to be used by patent holders when investigating farmers they believe may have violated patents or seed contracts. It now moves on the Senate. While the modified bill lacks the liability protections of the original bill, RPC supports its passage.
- **February 2008:** Sun West Foods in their rice producer letter urges continued opposition to the planting of genetically engineered rice varieties. Sun West believes that this is the rice industry's most critical challenge for the future.