

Press Notice from GM Free Cymru. 15th November 2006

New Evidence on American GM rice disaster -- scale of contamination is huge

New evidence from American sources shows that the GM rice disaster in the Southern United States is on a much greater scale than previously realized.

After weeks spent in trying to obtain information about the extent to which the "rogue GM variety" labelled LL601 has contaminated American rice supplies, GM Free Cymru has discovered that seven rice exporting members of the American Rice Federation have between them tested around 700 rice samples during September and October, with 32% showing contamination with Liberty Link (LL) traits (1). The two GM varieties showing up in these tests are LL601 and LL62, both of which are illegal in any quantity in rice exported from the US to the EU. Commenting for GM Free Cymru, Dr Brian John said: "This is a massive scale of contamination -- much greater than anybody anticipated. In the early days of the contamination incident, there were rumours that contaminated rice was showing up across the Southern States and in rice consignments of all types, but there were no actual results to verify what some of the more outspoken members of the US rice industry were saying. There has been a determined attempt by the US Administration to keep actual test results out of the public domain and to maintain a virtual news blackout (2). At the same time the Administration has mounted a huge "consumer reassurance" offensive, while putting considerable resources into a diplomatic campaign in individual EU countries to promote acceptance of contaminated rice. That official policy is now in tatters, as the truth leaks out."

GM Free Cymru has also pointed out that the scale of contamination is probably far greater than the rice industry admits, because many of the tests used in the USA involve the use of the "strip method" which is cheap, but statistically unreliable unless at least sixty sub-samples are tested at the same time. The EU has not accepted this "ten minute" test as valid, and it is inevitable that many of the supposedly "negative" test results obtained in the US should in fact be recorded as showing positive traces of contamination. It is quite likely that a figure of 40% contamination is nearer to the truth. Indeed, false test negatives and false certification accompanying US rice consignments have been at the heart of a major row between the US and the EU, leading to mandatory testing of US rice consignments at the European ports regardless of whether the consignments are accompanied by "GM Free " certification (3).

US Rice federation Vice-President said recently: "The traits are in the system, you cannot guarantee statistically that you'll ever get rid of them." So why is it that GM rice has spread itself so comprehensively across the Southern rice-growing states and effectively killed off the US rice export market? Partly the problem arises from the slapdash and even chaotic regulatory system in the United States. There is no proper record of the sites used by Aventis / Bayer for the experimental growing of its GM rice varieties, but it is known that at least 50 sites were used. The biggest plantings of the varieties coded LL62 and LL601 were in 1999 and 2000, and research in the files of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have now revealed that around 3,500 acres of GM rice were planted mostly in the states of Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana (4).

An estimated total crop weight of 9,800 tonnes was harvested, stored in silos, and then dumped into landfill sites under instructions from Aventis / Bayer. One of these sites was in Brazoria County, Texas, and another was in Craighead, Arkansas. Other dumps were in the vicinity of

Crowley in Louisiana. There was a small amount of media coverage of the Texas landfill, but the other dumps went unreported.

Dr John says: "The scale of these experimental plantings was enormous, as was the scale of dumping into landfill. We are talking about hundreds of trips by heavy trucks across land used for the growing of other rice varieties, the use of storage silos which might not have been segregated, and the use of combine harvesters for both GM and non-GM rice crops. No doubt those who were growing the GM varieties for Aventis / Bayer were very careful indeed with their procedures, but in the circumstances contamination was virtually inevitable. Also, from each experimental site Aventis held back several hundred tonnes of seed for further development use, and we have no idea what happened to that material. Probably some of it was used on experimental sites used by the AgCenter of the Louisiana State University (5). The company has allowed it to escape, and is culpable. One way or another, the GM seed has survived and multiplied in the period 2001-2006, probably without any systematic testing of American long-grain rice stocks for GM contamination. In fact, until August 2006 there was no verified LL601 identification test available to farmers, rice processors or exporters.

"This was a disaster waiting to happen, and no matter how tight the regulatory procedures are, it will happen again in America. Bayer must be punished for its incompetence. We must now ensure that no GM crops are grown commercially in the UK. If they are, we will have the "GM rice fiasco" all over again, and this time on our own doorsteps."

ENDS

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NOTES

(1) <http://www.nwanews.com/adg/News/171621/>

(2) The Enforcement Division of the US Securities and Exchange Division (SEC) exists to regulate the securities markets and protect investors. Although it is supposed to "promote full public disclosure" it also clearly has a function of censorship, supported by legislation. This is what Bill Reed of Riceland said when the LL601 story broke: "There was input from them because this was significant. They told us, 'You're not to talk about this.' In fact, we weren't even able to tell our salesmen."

(3) <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/fn/4280858.html>

(4) <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-PEST/2000/May/Day-03/p11032.htm>

(5) LSU Crowley is the site of the USA rice "foundation seed program." Contamination of foundation seed stocks would be a very serious matter. At least one sample from foundation seed rice at Crowley has tested positive for LL601. It is reputed to have come from 2003 Cheniere foundation seed.

<http://www.aqfax.com/news/2006/08/lsull.htm>