

Brussels, 23 August 2006

Questions and Answers on the finding of unauthorised GM rice on the US market

What information has the Commission received with regard to unauthorised GM rice on US market?

The US authorities informed the European Commission in the evening of 18 August 2006 that trace amounts of non-authorised genetically modified rice had been detected in samples of commercial long grain rice on the US market. The unauthorized GM rice in question is LL Rice 601, a GM rice strain that Bayer had worked on (including field trials from 1998 to 2001) but had decided not to commercialize. Bayer therefore did not seek regulatory approval for this GMO. Two similar GM rice types (LL Rice 62 and LL Rice 06) are authorized in the USA, but not in the EU. The protein found in LL RICE 601 is approved for use in other crops,. Bayer is now requesting an authorization for LL 601 rice in the USA, in light of the current situation. An investigation is ongoing in the USA as to how and to what extent the unauthorized GM entered the supply chain.

Does this finding pose a threat to the safety of EU consumers?

The US authorities have said that these traces of the unauthorised GM rice in commercial rice do not pose safety concerns, and similar lines are legally on the US market for human and animal consumption. However, the EU practices a very strict policy of only allowing GMOs which have undergone full scientific assessment and authorisation in the EU. Under EU legislation, even traces of unauthorised GMOS are illegal. Therefore, any product containing GMOs which have not been authorised in the EU, such as the LL Rice 601, will be blocked from the EU market. This is to ensure that the highest possible level of consumer protection is maintained in the EU.

What did the Commission do in response to this announcement by the USA?

Once the European Commission had been informed of the presence of traces of unauthorised rice on the US market, it immediately wrote to the US authorities to request more detailed information on the situation, in particular in relation to the risk assessment and detection method for the GMO in question. In addition, the Commission also urgently met with representatives from the company which produced the unauthorised GMO, in order to get additional information.

What measures is the EU taking in response to this situation?

In order to prevent LL Rice 601 from reaching the EU market through US imports, the Commission has adopted a decision requiring imports of long grain rice from the USA to be certified as free from the unauthorised GMO LL Rice 601. This means that only consignments of US long grain rice that have been tested by an accredited laboratory using a validated detection method, and are accompanied by a certificate assuring the absence of LL Rice 601, can enter the EU.

Controls will be carried out on consignments at the EU borders, to ensure that no product containing unauthorised GMOs is being imported, and Member States will also carry out sample testing on products already on the EU market.

How long will these measures remain in place?

The measures will remain in place for 6 months, after which the situation will be reviewed again.

Who is responsible for checking imports for unauthorised GMOs?

Member State authorities are responsible for import controls and for ensuring that food which contains unauthorised GMOs does not enter the EU. The risk associated with different types of food and feed, are taken into account when deciding upon the frequency of these controls.

The Commission has asked Member States to step up their border controls in response to the US findings of non-authorised GM rice mixed in with conventional rice, to ensure this unauthorised rice does not reach the EU consumer.

In line with EU General Food Law, business operators also have a responsibility for ensuring that any long grain rice they import from the USA is certified as free from LL Rice 601.

What happens if the unauthorised GM rice is found in imports?

The EU Regulation on official feed and food controls provides for a number of measures which can be taken in the case of an unauthorised GMO being found in a consignment for import, including the complete destruction of the consignment or its return to the country of origin.

How much rice does the EU import from the USA, and how does this compare to other countries?

The USA is one of the major suppliers of rice to the EU. The EU imports approximately 20.000 tons of long grain husked, semi-milled and wholly-milled rice from the USA per month on average. Other major suppliers of rice to the EU are India, Thailand and Guyana.

Is any GM rice variety authorised in the EU? Is any EU authorisation of GM rice in the pipeline?

Currently no GM rice is authorised in the EU for food and feed use or for cultivation or import. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is currently examining one application for authorisation which concerns a genetically modified rice. This is Bayer's LL Rice 62, which contains the same modified protein as the unauthorised LL Rice 601 in question.

For more information on EU legislation on GMOs, see: [MEMO/05/104](#)

And http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/biotechnology/gmintro_en.htm