



Department of Justice requests more information from seed companies on soybean traits

By Sara Wyant

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Washington, UPDATED Jan. 15 – Monsanto disclosed Thursday that it's been asked to turn over information about its soybean traits business to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). In a statement e-mailed to *Agri-Pulse*, the company said the DOJ is primarily seeking documents confirming that farmers and independent seed companies will continue to have access to the first-generation Roundup Ready herbicide tolerance trait (RR1) following patent expiry in 2014.

"Monsanto continues to cooperate with the U.S. Department of Justice inquiries, just as we have over the last several months," said Scott Partridge, Monsanto's Chief Deputy General Counsel. "We respect the thorough regulatory process. We believe our business practices are fair, pro-competitive and in compliance with the law."

The DOJ and U.S. Department of Agriculture are conducting an ongoing review of the entire agriculture industry, including the seed and trait industry. We asked rival seed company DuPont, which owns Pioneer Hi-Bred, whether or not they had also received a Civil Investigative Demand (CID) from the DOJ.

DuPont spokesman Dan Turner confirmed that DuPont also received a CID.

"As we have stated in the past, we have received requests for information from the Justice Department concerning the same matter." Turner declined to comment when asked what specific information the agency had requested.

In response to questions in December, Monsanto notified farm groups that the company would continue to license RR1 to seed companies and universities through the expiration of patents and beyond, even though it was phasing out use of the technology in its soybean varieties in favor of a new, higher-yielding trait called Roundup Ready 2 Yield.

"Given the pace and scale of agriculture biotechnology adoption as well as the expiration of the Roundup Ready soybean patents in 2014, we understand why regulators would want to know more about competition in modern agriculture and how products are commercialized and used," said Partridge.

For previous coverage of the joint USDA/DOJ focus on ag competitiveness issues, go to:
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