October 5, 2007

APHIS Investigation yields few clues on contaminated rice

By Sara Wyant, Agri-Pulse Editor

After 14 months and 8,500 staff hours devoted to studying the situation, USDA was unable to determine "**the exact mechanism for introduction**" of unapproved genetic traits into the commercial rice supply and "**unable to make any definitive determination that could have resulted in enforcement action."** Given the lack of available information and evidence, no actions will be taken against Bayer CropScience.

The investigation was initiated on Aug. 1, 2006, after Bayer CropScience reported that regulated LLRICE601 had been detected in the long-grain rice variety Cheniere. LLRICE601, which is similar to two previously deregulated lines, and was subsequently deregulated in November 2006. The investigation was expanded on Feb. 16, 2007 to include the discovery of regulated GE rice, later identified as LLRICE604, in the long-grain rice variety Clearfield 131 (CL131). Although the rice was considered to be safe, **the trace presence was enough to disrupt U.S. rice exports on a wide scale, including the effective exclusion of U.S. long-grain rice from the EU market.**

As a result of extensive sampling, investigators were able to determine that the presence of LLRICE601 was limited to Cheniere and that the presence of LLRICE604 was limited to CL131. In both cases, only trace amounts of GE material were present. No short- or medium-grain rice varieties tested positive for either LLRICE601 or LLRICE604.

Investigators were also able to confirm that from 1999 to 2001, LLRICE601 and Cheniere were **both grown at the same time at the Rice Research Station in Crowley, La which was operated by Louisiana State University**. The Crowley research station was working under a Bayer CropScience contract. LLRICE604 and CL131 also were grown at the Crowley research station, but the planting of LLRICE604 and CL131 did not occur at the same time. This means that the most likely entry point for LLRICE604 into CL131 was through a means other than direct cross-pollination.

APHIS released a report of the findings (www.aphis.usda.gov) as well as a list of lessons learned from this experience. The agency is considering establishing retention requirements for records---something that would have aided their investigation. APHIS also is considering greater isolation distances between seed breeding fields and GE varieties in order to reduce the likelihood of

pollen flow, explained APHIS Administrator Cindy Smith during a press conference this afternoon.

The report points to the need for increased corporate responsibility and stewardship by the biotechnology industry, according to the USA Rice Federation.

"Given the lack of meaningful explanation by APHIS into what caused the Liberty Link (LL) traits to be in the U.S. supply, the push by the USA Rice Federation for uniform testing of U.S. rice and the aggressive promulgation of a seed plan to eliminate the LL traits from the U.S. commercial supply were the right things to do," USA Rice Federation Chairman Al Montna said in a statement today.

As of September 30, testing results for the 2007 southern long-grain rice crop continue to show the overwhelming absence of genetically engineered Liberty Link (LL) traits, he noted.
