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Rice found to contain engineered protein

By KEVIN FREKING, Associated Press Writer
Published 3:37 pm PDT Friday, August 18, 2006

WASHINGTON (AP) - Long-grain rice samples from the United States have tested positive for trace amounts of a genetically modified strain not approved for consumption, but it doesn't pose a threat to humans or the environment, federal officials said Friday.

The genetically engineered rice was detected by Bayer CropScience AG. The German company then notified U.S. officials. The strain is not approved for sale in the United States, but two other strains of rice with the same genetically engineered protein are.

U.S. officials said they have contacted foreign trade partners to assure them of the product's safety. They said the United States would provide those partners with any necessary information to alleviate concerns.

The rice was developed to resist a specific type of herbicide.

"There are no human health, food safety or environmental concerns associated with this (genetically engineered) rice," said Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns.

Johanns said he saw no need to recall the product. He also said that Bayer would request permission to market the product. Still, he added, an investigation was needed to determine how a regulated product was released into the market and whether any violation of USDA regulations occurred.

The sample came from the 2005 food crop. Johanns said he did not know where the product came from. Department officials later said the rice samples came from storage bins in Arkansas and Missouri; however they did not know specifically where the rice was grown.

Johanns said he could not estimate how much of the product is on shelves or has been exported.

"I was asked what percentage of rice may be impacted by this? I just hate to venture out there because there is nothing I have that I could base that statement on," he said.

A spokesman for Bayer CropScience, Greg Coffey, said the protein in question is well known to regulators and has been confirmed safe for food and feed use in many countries.

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The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852
Phone: (916) 321-1000

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