The Oregonian

http://www.oregonlive.com/business/index.ssf/2013/09/genetically_modified_alfalfa_c.html

Genetically modified alfalfa confirmed in Washington test sample

By The Associated Press
September 13, 2013

SPOKANE - Alfalfa seed and plant samples taken from an Eastern Washington farm contain a low level of genetic modification, even though the farmer reportedly did not want to grow such crops, the state Department of Agriculture announced Friday.

The agency said the samples showed a low-level presence of a genetic trait called Round-Up Ready, meaning they are able to tolerate the well-known herbicide. The tests did not reveal the percentage of Round-Up Ready presence in the samples. The testing was ordered after a hay farmer who intended to grow alfalfa that was not genetically modified had his crop rejected by a broker who found evidence of genetically modified pesticide resistance.

"This is the end of the process for the Washington state Department of Agriculture," said Mike Louisell, a spokesman for the agency. The results were shared with the farmer and with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, he said. The federal agency will make its own decision on whether to take any action in the case, he said.

A spokesman for the U.S. Department of Agriculture was not available for comment late Friday. The name of the farmer has not been released. Round-Up Ready alfalfa, used as animal feed, has been approved by the federal government and is grown for both the domestic and export markets, the state said.

"There is strong market demand for Round-Up Ready alfalfa and conventional alfalfa varieties," the state agency said in a press release. The samples were tested at the agency's Yakima, Wash., lab.

State Sen. Maralyn Chase, D-Shoreline, said the incident shows the dangers of genetically modified crops. "Our state's farmers are becoming collateral damage to the reckless practices of the agriculture industry in this country," Chase said. "More than 60 of our trade partners throughout the world have bans on the import of unlabeled GMO foods." Genetically modified alfalfa is legal to grow and sell in the U.S. That makes this incident different from May's discovery of genetically modified wheat in an Oregon field. Modified wheat is illegal in the U.S. outside of licensed test fields.

Consumers have shown increasing interest in avoiding genetically modified foods, so it has been important to separate them from products that are unmodified. After the broker discovered the alfalfa was genetically modified, the farmer contacted the state Agriculture Department in late August, and tests began after Labor Day, Louisell said.

Pesticide-resistant alfalfa was developed by Monsanto Co. and has been licensed to several companies. Monsanto spokesman Thomas Helscher said Thursday that major importers of U.S. alfalfa, including the United Arab Emirates, Japan and South Korea, have no restrictions on genetically modified crops, and negotiations with China over imports of modified alfalfa are ongoing.

A group in Washington calling for more rigorous food labeling said the incident shows the need for more scrutiny. "This really does go to show that some of our trading partners are sensitive to genetically engineered crops," said Elizabeth Larter, spokeswoman for the Yes on 522 campaign, which is pushing a fall ballot measure that calls for labeling at the seed level. Genetic modification can be as simple as identifying desirable traits in a plant and breeding them into a crop, sometimes forming a new species. What many markets fear, particularly Europe and parts of Asia, is the impact of recombinant DNA on the human body in ways we haven't yet understood. That includes the potential for desirable traits in one species to transfer to another species, where the trait would be harmful. This is true of herbicide-resistant wheat and alfalfa. If such herbicide resistance were accidentally to slip into the DNA of a weed, for instance, it could form a superweed, impossible to kill with modern methods.

The New York Times

Japan and South Korea Bar Imports of U.S. Wheat

By VICTORIA SHANNON

Published: May 31, 2013

Japan and South Korea suspended some imports of American wheat, and the European Union urged its 27 nations to increase testing, after the United States government disclosed this week that a strain of genetically engineered wheat that was never approved for sale was found growing in an Oregon field.

Although none of the wheat, developed by Monsanto Company, was found in any grain shipments — and the Department of Agriculture said there would be no health risk if any was shipped — governments in Asia and Europe acted quickly to limit their risk.

South Korea, which last year purchased roughly half of its total wheat imports of five million tons from the United States, said Friday it would suspend purchases until tests were performed on arriving shipments. Results of the tests, by the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety, were expected in the first week of June, according to local media.

Seoul also raised quarantine measures on wheat for livestock feed, while Thailand put ports on alert.

The European Union, which has a "zero tolerance" approach to genetically modified crops, said through its consumer protection office Friday that if any shipments tested positive, they would not be sold.

It also said it was seeking "further information and reassurance" from Washington and had asked Monsanto for help in developing a reliable test for the genetically modified strain.

The United States is the world's biggest exporter of wheat. While genetically engineered corn and soybeans are routinely grown, they are largely consumed by animals, while wheat is consumed directly by people and has faced more consumer resistance.

The strain of wheat was developed by Monsanto to resist its Roundup herbicide, but the company ended its field trials in 2004. How it came to be growing in Oregon was not clear.

Japan and Mexico are among the biggest importers of American wheat. The European Union imports more than one million tons each year, mostly to Spain.

Reuters and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Bloomberg News

Bayer Agrees to Pay $750 Million to End Lawsuits Over Gene-Modified Rice

By Andrew Harris and David Beasley Jul 1, 2011

A Bayer AG (BAYN) unit agreed to a $750 million settlement resolving claims with about 11,000 U.S. farmers who said a strain of the company's genetically modified rice tainted crops and ruined their export value.

The settlement, announced yesterday, ends scores of lawsuits filed against the Bayer CropScience unit of the Leverkusen, Germany-based company by farmers in Texas, Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas and Mississippi.

The U.S. Agriculture Department said in August 2006 that trace amounts of the company's experimental LibertyLink strain were found in U.S. long-grain rice. Within four days, declining rice futures cost U.S. growers about $150 million, according to a complaint filed by the farmers. News of the contamination caused futures prices to fall about 14 percent.

"From the outset of this litigation, we made it clear to Bayer that the company needed to step up and take responsibility for damaging American rice farmers with its unapproved rice seeds," Adam Levitt, a plaintiffs' lawyer, said yesterday in a statement. "This excellent settlement goes a long way toward achieving that goal."

Bayer confirmed the settlement in its own press statement minutes later.

"Although Bayer CropScience believes it acted responsibly in the handling of its biotech rice, the company considers it important to resolve the litigation so that it can move forward focused on its fundamental mission of providing innovative solutions to modern agriculture," Greg Coffey, a spokesman for the company, said in the statement.

Herbicide-Resistant

The accord is contingent upon the participation of growers representing at least 85 percent of the U.S. long-grain rice acreage planted between 2006 and 2009, the company and plaintiffs' lawyers said separately.

Bayer and Louisiana State University had tested the rice, bred to be resistant to Bayer's Liberty-brand herbicide, at a school-run facility in Crowley, Louisiana.

The genetically modified variety cross-bred with and "contaminated" more than 30 percent of U.S. ricelands, Don Downing, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said at the start of the first farmers' trial in November 2009.

Exports fell as the European Union, Japan, Russia and other overseas buying ceased or was slowed for testing of U.S.-grown long grain rice, the growers said.

"Our clients and other rice farmers were devastated by the loss of markets around the world," said a third plaintiffs' lawyer, Scott Powell of Hare, Wynn, Newell & Newton.

Trace Amounts

The company denied the testing program was negligently managed and claimed sale prices rebounded after the initial drop. It said the trace amounts of the LibertyLink rice posed no threat to people.

Juries in the first six cases to be tried awarded farmers about $54 million in total compensatory and punitive damages before the company settled a seventh case three days into an October 2010 trial at the U.S. courthouse in St. Louis.

It paid the Texas growers $290,000, Downing said then.

Under yesterday's accord, farmers who sustained market losses will be compensated for each acre of rice they grew on an annual declining scale encompassing the years 2006 through 2010.

A grower who participated in all five seasons would receive $120 per acre for 2006, $80 per acre for 2007, $60 per acre for 2008, $40 for 2009 and $10 for 2010 for a maximum of $310 per acre.

Compensation Pools

Two other compensation pools have been created under the pact: one for farmers who planted two contaminated varieties and another for growers who didn't plaint tainted strains yet suffered damages beyond market loss. Those latter claims, if disputed by Bayer, would be subject to binding arbitration.

"In the farming community, most people live by the principle that if you harm a neighbor, you make it right," Downing said in his press statement yesterday. "After almost five years of litigation," Bayer has finally made an effort to make it right."

The federal case is In re Genetically Modified Rice Litigation, 06-md-01811, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Missouri (St. Louis).

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THE WESTERN PRODUCER

Roundup Ready in alfalfa exports ‘catastrophic’

http://www.producer.com/2014/11/roundup-ready-in-alfalfa-exports-catastrophic/

China market closed | U.S. exporters blacklisted because of GM presence in the crop

Posted Nov. 28th, 2014 *by* Mary MacArthur

BROMONT, Que. — The discovery of Roundup Ready alfalfa in global hay exports should be on Canadian farmers’ radar, says a Canadian hay exporter.

Ed Shaw, who exports forage around the world, including to China, said three American hay exporters have been blacklisted from exporting hay to China, and hundreds of container loads of hay have been turned away after Roundup Ready alfalfa was found in the loads.

“In the export market, it has be-come a really hot topic item with the Chinese market. The Chinese have zero tolerance for GMO,” Shaw said during a discussion about the introduction of Roundup Ready alfalfa in Canada at a recent forage conference. “It’s catastrophic.”

Forage Genetics International, which has the right to sell Roundup Ready alfalfa in Canada, seeded 11 test plots in Quebec and Ontario this year and is looking to expand its test locations and studies next year.

Roundup Ready alfalfa is registered and allowed to be grown in the United States, but Shaw said U.S. exporters have been blacklisted because of the genetically modified crop.

“They have had three strikes against them and the U.S. is considering totally shutting down the Chinese market until we get something established,” he said.

“China has zero tolerance and I mean zero tolerance, not several parts per million but zero tolerance.”

Shaw is worried that Canadian hay exporters will be shut out of the market if GM canola seed is found in hay crops.

“I am afraid that if we start testing our alfalfa for zero tolerance, I bet we would fail,” he said.

“Now the USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) and the Chinese are trying to work on a tolerance level. If you have canola field next to an alfalfa field and get some trash, it’s going to check positive on the forage.”

Forage Seed Canada president Heather Kerschbaumer said a container load of her farm’s timothy hay was rejected because of the discovery of one canola seed in a 25 gram sample destined for Japan three years ago.

“(It) was enough to cause the company we had the contract with to cancel our contract,” she said.

“We lost $20,000 because of one canola seed.”

It’s a troubling trend for Canadian grass and forage seed growers, who export thousands of tonnes of seed around the world. The discovery of a Roundup Ready alfalfa seed in an alfalfa, timothy, red clover, brome or fescue shipment would put an end to all export markets.

Kerschbaumer said her Golden Acre Seed Co. had nine non-Roundup Ready alfalfa samples tested last year for the presence of Roundup Ready alfalfa, and all tested negative.

“We find alfalfa in 60 to 70 percent of the lots shipped out of the Peace. If it is genetically modified, we would lose all those markets as well.”

Kerschbaumer said she recently visited the Imperial Valley in California, where counties have outlawed the growing of Roundup Ready alfalfa because of their large vegetable production. Alfalfa is used in the rotation with vegetable crops.

Kerschbaumer said she returned from that trip with a glimmer of hope that there are ways to stop Roundup Ready alfalfa from being introduced into Canada, at least in Western Canada.

“They told us if they can’t keep it out of Canada, keep it out of the West,” she said.

“If you can’t keep it out of the West, you should keep it out of Alberta. If you can’t keep it out of Alberta, you should keep it out of the Peace because there will be benefits and bonuses paid on the seed that is produced that is GE free.”

Shaw said the three blacklisted hay producers are from the Imperial Valley. The rules that prohibit the production of Roundup Ready alfalfa don’t stop the hay from being processed in the area.

“What has been processed there has been contaminated. They’re bringing hay in from God knows where. You can’t grow it, but processors can still bring it in.”

Kerschbaumer said Forage Seed Canada wants to raise awareness of the issue and encourage farmers to test their alfalfa seed before it’s planted.

“It’s a big awareness issue,” she said.

“You want the cattle people to be aware not to plant it. They could be unknowingly planting this stuff and contaminating fence lines and ditches, which could contaminated someone’s seed fields.”

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Bloomberg News

U.S. Grain Losses Seen Up to $6.3 Billion on China Ban

By Megan Durisin and Jeff Wilson Apr 16, 2014

China's rejection of U.S. grain grown with seeds genetically modified by Syngenta AG may cost U.S. growers as much as $6.3 billion in losses through August 2015, a U.S. trade group estimated.

The Asian nation turned away at least 1.45 million metric tons of corn since late November, "substantially greater" than the 908,800 reported by the Chinese government, the National Grain & Feed Association, based in Washington, said today in a statement. The grain contained a gene developed by Basel, Switzerland's Syngenta, and that MIR 162 variety hasn't been approved by China.

The "zero-tolerance policy" by China has cost as much as $2.9 billion in corn, distiller grain and soybean revenue, the U.S. group said, and as much as an additional $3.4 billion may be lost in the 12 months starting Sept. 1 after Syngenta offers another modified corn seed still to be approved by China and several other countries.

"All of us are very hopeful that China will soon approve" the MIR 162 trait, Randall Gordon, the president of the trade group, said in a telephone interview. "Growers need to weigh the benefits of the access to new technology with what their markets are."

Prices Depressed

The group estimates that benchmark U.S. corn prices are 11 cents a bushel lower because of the trade discord. Some U.S. soybean shipments were canceled by China after tests for MIR 162, and prices probably fell 15 cents a bushel, the association said.

Cancellations to date cost in a range of $1 billion to $2.9 billion, and the introduction of the new seed that hasn't been approved may lead to losses from $1.2 billion to $3.4 billion, the group said.

On the Chicago Board of Trade today, corn futures for July delivery fell 1.2 percent to settle at $5.035. The grain has advanced 19 percent this year, entering a bull market on March 31 as export sales climbed and record-high cattle and hog prices boosted prospects for demand in livestock-feed rations.

Soybean futures for July delivery rose 1.4 percent to $15.0875, capping the biggest three-day rally since November as demand from U.S. mills climbed to a record. The oilseed has gained 17 percent this year.

Corn is the biggest U.S. crop, followed by soybeans, and China is the biggest oilseed importer.

The U.S. is the leading corn exporter and second-biggest soybean shipper, trailing Brazil.

More than 1,050 grain, feed, processing, exporting and other related companies belong to the National Grain & Feed Association.

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