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Rice Food Safety & other Facts

Newsletter Nr. 4

15th Nov 2008

FOOD SAFETY

- Rapid Alert System

On Oct 10th a notification was sent on by Slovenia concerning altered organoleptic characteristics of long and short grain rice from Italy infested with insects.

Source: RASFF weekly Overview nr. 44

- On Nov 10th a new co-operation **agreement** was signed between the EU **Joint Research Centre (JRC)** and the **European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)** that will advance scientific co-operation and the development of international standards in the field of food and feed safety. The JRC is committed to working with EFSA to provide essential scientific data to contribute to informed and responsible policy decisions in industry as well as in government. The agreement will aim to ensure that additional robust data is provided for risk assessment, that harmonised standards are applied to data generation and that analytical best practices are shared.

Source: www.efsa.europa.eu

ORGANIC FOOD

Can organic agriculture feed Asia? According to A. Dobermann and D. Dawe (IRRI) the answer is "no". Numerous long-term experiments have demonstrated that the continuous use of organic amendments does not lead to significant yield advantages compared with systems that are managed with judicious and balanced use of mineral fertilizers. Organic practices can result in nutrient imbalances, short-term yield reductions are common and organic agricultural systems appear to require both premium prices and government subsidies to remain economically viable on a large scale. They also require diversion of land to accommodate rotations with nonfood or low-yielding leguminous crops, thus reducing food production. This may be feasible in industrialized countries, but, in developing countries with high population densities and limited agricultural land, it can threaten national food security and poverty reduction by leading to higher food prices. Moreover, 45 years of research have shown that modern, **intensive rice farming is sustainable** and can even improve soil health, thanks to the unique features of carbon and nitrogen cycling in submerged soil.

Source: *Rice Today*, Oct-Dec 2008

GMO & BIOTECH

- **Vietnam supports GM research:** a pilot programme has been recently approved to develop and apply biotechnology in agriculture and animal husbandry till 2020. Under this plan, Vietnam will put some genetically modified GM crops in mass production and then clone animals. Annually the state budget will spend around \$6.25 million on this programme. Vietnam allows the development of GM plants and animals and genetic modification has been used on **rice, maize and cotton**.

Source: <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/tech/2008/10/806498>

- Rice plants are used as model-plant in the laboratories of **Basf** company in Ghent (Belgium), where new cultivars are selected, tested and developed with the aim to launch commercial products in various crops, in partnership with **Monsanto**. Each year about 140,000 **GM plants are tested** for yield-enhancement, drought tolerance and improved nutrient use efficiency.

Source: *Agrisole*



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SCIENCE & RESEARCH

Scientists from University of California Davis, led by plant pathologist Pamela Ronald, have developed a **new tool for investigating rice gene function**. The inexpensive, publicly-available rice DNA microarray covers nearly all the 45,000 genes in the rice genome. The researchers hope their tool will lead to the advancement of functional genomics studies of rice. Scientists have developed high-throughput methods to examine gene expression profiles using "DNA Microarrays or genomic chips", thousands of fragments of DNA fixed to a glass slide. The technology allows scientists to get a better picture of the interaction of thousands of genes simultaneously.

Source: <http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0003337>

LAWS, STANDARDS & AGREEMENTS

Negotiations has been recently launched aiming at full **liberalisation of trade in agriculture between the EU and Switzerland**. The upcoming negotiations are a logical continuation of the liberalization process, which has been ongoing since the 1972 Agreement and which is enshrined, as far as agriculture is concerned, in the 1999 bilateral Agriculture Agreement. In addition to ending tariffs between the two parties, negotiations on non-tariff issues, such as food and feed safety will constitute a separate element in the total context of these talks.

Source: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/index_it.htm

OTHER NEWS

Bayer CropScience is aiming to help make a "second green revolution" possible in Asia by developing new, **high-yielding varieties of rice**. The company plans to expand substantially the breeding and marketing of commercial rice seed in the region, with the aim of increasing the production volume eightfold by 2017. The new development center, situated north of Bangkok, rounds out the company's involvement in rice in the Asia Pacific region: a rice research laboratory was opened in Singapore last June. Bayer CropScience has extensive expertise in the field of classical breeding and development of hybrid rice. The company markets conventional hybrid rice varieties under the Arize® brand in seven countries which together represent over half of the world's rice cultivation area. They include major rice producers such as India, Indonesia and Brazil. High-quality Arize® seed combines excellent genetic purity and germination capacity with a yield potential that is at least 20 percent above that of classic rice varieties.

Source: www.bayercropscience.com

EVENTS & MEETINGS

- The International Society for Biosafety Research (ISBR) will hold its **10th Symposium on the Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organisms** in Wellington, New Zealand, 16-21 November 2008. Established as a biennial event since 1990 to showcase environmental biosafety research, the Symposium brings together scientific researchers, policy makers, regulators, non-governmental organizations and industry representatives to foster productive dialogue and multidisciplinary approaches while embracing diverse perspectives from all parts of the globe, highlighting past achievements in biosafety research of GMOs and charting future.

Source: www.isbr.info