

Meeting at Aventis, Brussels - 24 October 2000

Present

Donna Mitten – Aventis Global Product Safety Manager
Conor Dobson – Aventis Public & Government Affairs, Europe
Damien Plant – Aventis Public & Government Affairs, Europe

Michael Bellingham - NERMA Secretariat

Aventis position

1. Conor Dobson (Public & Government Affairs, Europe) introduced Donna Mitten, Global Product Safety Manager for rice, and Damien Plan who is in charge of regulatory activities in the EU for the rice project. He said that the purpose of the meeting was to inform NERMA of the status of developments in GM rice and to learn more about the rice millers interests and concerns as far as the potential introduction of GM rice. For the meeting he proposed to discuss the following points:

- What is Liberty Link rice
- Benefits for rice production
- Regulatory status - USA, EU, globally
- Development status and commercialisation plans
- Contact with US rice industry

2. Donna Mitten explained that LibertyLink rice was herbicide resistant (to the Liberty herbicide also known as Basta). It could be an important tool for the control of red rice and had received a great deal of grower interest. There was currently no selective herbicide for red rice and it was very difficult to control. Liberty controlled a number of other weeds and could be used once or twice in the growing season. They had undertaken water quality studies, which had shown that its use led to less silting.

3. Ms Mitten announced that 2,000 acres of LibertyLink rice had been planted in the 2000 season; in Arkansas within 45 miles of dedicated storage, and in Louisiana, within 20 miles of dedicated storage. Dedicated trucks had been used to transport the crop to the storage sites. The rice had been grown under contract and Aventis were working with Riceland Foods on possible commercial uses for this stored rice. LibertyLink rice was a medium grain variety for use, for example, in the brewery and breakfast cereals industry.

4. Aventis had received clearance from USDA and FDA for LibertyLink rice at the end of August. The last registrative hurdle was for with the EPA for herbicide residues ie not for the rice itself but for the Liberty herbicide. Clearance was expected in the spring of next year.

5. Aventis stressed that the rice would be of commercial interest only in the US, and possibly Canada. However, Mr Plan said Aventis would be applying for use in Europe under Novel Foods legislation and 90/220 approval for placing on the market. Applications would go in at the beginning of next year. There was as yet no Novel Feed legislation but

use as a feed was covered under 90/220 application. They were looking at the possibility of growing this rice in Italy.

6. The LibertyLink rice contained protein that disappeared on cooking; this would occur even with parboiling. The amount of protein in LibertyLink rice was comparable with other rice on the market. DNA in the rice would be found using PCR techniques and Aventis were very conscious of testing for this rice and said that the test methodologies for this rice were as standard.

7. Aventis went on to say that they were currently developing a long grain variety, which should be available in 2003/2004.

8. They also said that they had been in contact with the US rice producers organisations and that they wanted an open dialogue with the EU rice industry.

NERMA view

9. I thanked Aventis for their openness but expressed a number of concerns at these developments. In the first instance I made them aware of the European Rice Milling Industry position on biotechnology and that no GM rice could currently be marketed or grown in Europe. Further there was clear consumer opposition to GM products and that until it had gained acceptance there was no market for GM rice in Europe. I went on to stress that that supplies from areas where GM rice is commercialised risk rejection by EU consumers and that the integrity of non-GM rice supplies was of fundamental importance.

10. I said that in this instance if the dedicated stocks of LibertyLink rice were to be milled then NERMA would have severe concerns on possible contamination of non-GM stocks for supply to the EU. This must be borne in mind for all future developments regardless of whether GM rice was intended to be marketed in the EU. Aventis confirmed that the dedicated stocks had not yet been milled and that they would not be until the EPA clearance had been given. However they would aim to mill these stocks in the future and to work with Ricelands at a commercial outlet for them.

11. I also said that it was difficult to ever envisage EU consumers being persuaded of the benefit of GM rice unless they could see an end product that had substantial advantages over non-GM rice. This was clearly not the case with LibertyLink rice. Further there was a very real danger that if consumers were made aware that GM rice was in commercial production in the US, that they might switch to buying rice from other countries.

12. I went on to outline the uses of milled rice and its by-products in Europe, particularly stressing the use of rice flour in baby food and the extreme sensitivities here of GM issues. I also said that bran was used in the feed industry, and that again there would be great sensitivities over GM issues. Aventis were keen to discover if there were any properties of a GM rice, eg with starch modification, that might be of interest to rice millers.

12. I thanked Aventis once again for their openness and said that I would inform NERMA members of these developments and respond further with any concerns.