



Timely, Reliable Information  
for Delta Agriculture

- HOME
- COTTON
- SOYBEANS
- RICE
- CORN
- WHEAT
- LEGISLATIVE
- MARKETS
- BIOFUELS
- EQUIP

- [SAVE THIS](#)
- [EMAIL THIS](#)
- [PRINT THIS](#)
- [MOST POPULAR](#)

Share 0 tweet

## Fall-out from GMO rice in U.S. supply continues

Aug 28, 2006 9:59 AM, By David Bennett  
Farm Press Editorial Staff

When cool weather arrives and harvest season is done, Southern farmers will remember 2006 as exceedingly difficult. Mother Nature has played no cropping favorites — drought, oppressive heat and high energy costs have pummeled all. But after a USDA announcement on Aug. 18, rice farmers can surely claim the cruelest blow.

On that day, USDA head Mike Johanns announced that trace amounts of unapproved, genetically modified Liberty Link rice had been found in the U.S. rice supply. Despite FDA assurances that the contamination — equivalent to six kernels per 10,000 — was safe for consumption, the markets dipped quickly.

Farmers who had seen the rising price of rice as a salve for drained bank accounts and hard days in the field immediately began asking questions. And, although every facet of the rice industry has been hit with the unwelcome news, most questions were directed at Stuttgart, Ark.-based Riceland Foods.

Claiming 9,000 members, the Riceland co-op handles a third of the nation's rice crop. It was a Riceland customer who first alerted the company to a potential problem last January. According to Bill Reed, Riceland vice president of public affairs, the months between that initial inquiry and Johann's statement have often felt like "looking in a haystack and not even knowing you're looking for a needle."

Reed spoke at length with *Delta Farm Press* on Aug. 25. Among his comments:

### On current developments...

"There are some positives — although this is a situation where you have to look hard to find any. But the market was up 2 cents today. That shows a little stability..."

"There's a lot of work being done by agencies within USDA. I know the Foreign Agricultural Service is working very hard with customers around the world that import U.S. rice. APHIS is investigating how this situation came to be.

"The rice industry has (told APHIS), 'You need to speed this as quickly as you can. We must have more information than we have now.' (APHIS is) showing every indication they understand that.

"As they do their investigation, they've told us any (discoveries)... will be shared. They won't hold onto information until a final report is written.

"Frankly, all the (federal) agencies... have shown much concern as we've gone through this. They're all focused because we keep telling them, 'This is so important to rice farmers. We're in a situation where it's been another expensive crop to produce due to fuel and fertilizer prices. It's been hot for a long time. There are always concerns when (the crop faces) high temperatures like we've had. Farmers are physically worn out from trying to keep water on rice and beans. They're weary. And then we had good market prospects and this hits.'

"On the domestic front, the market hates uncertainty. Obviously there's uncertainty surrounding this.

"But as we've been talking with our domestic customers this week, they understand the message FDA and (Johanns) have put out: there are no safety concerns with this very small presence. Commerce continues. People continue to buy rice and consume it. That's a very positive sign."

### On farmers and harvesting...

"We're on the verge of harvesting a crop. Actually, it's already begun but, depending on the weather, it'll be going in earnest next week.

"As one might expect, we've spoken with many farmers. They want to know what to do.

### Organ

Black, farms  
[www.trc](#)

### Incre:

Increa Crop P  
[www.st](#)

### Rice C

Find R  
[www.Pr](#)

### Dairy

New L  
Top Ar  
[www.SU](#)

### REAL

### Resi opti

Aug 24, There :  
Arkans weeds, have p limit...

### Farn

Aug 24, A drou produc affect t

### Brao of th

Aug 24, A pion Black c growin crop he year...

### Stuc

Aug 24, Mississ monito and try

### Con seed

Aug 24,

“For our farmer members, it’s business as usual. Cut your crop, deliver your crop and bring it to the dryer. We’re going to dump trucks as fast as we can just like we always have...We’re going to find a way through this situation.”

Order 1 offering release

[More A](#)

**Is the trait in specific varieties? Farmers want to know so they can segregate them, clean out their combines and go back to harvest. Is there any indication one way or the other?**

“That’s what APHIS has to tell us. We don’t know where it is or isn’t. We do know it’s scattered and random throughout the South.

Delta Far  
Southea  
Southwe  
Western

“But we don’t know if it’s limited to varieties. APHIS will determine that and we’ve told them they must find that out as quickly as possible and let everyone know. That’s for APHIS to discover.”

**Has APHIS given a timeframe other than ‘as quickly as possible?’ Have they said they’ll try to get that data within a month? A couple of weeks?**

“I’ve asked that. They’ve said, ‘We can’t tell you how long it’ll take.’ It depends on how they go through the discovery process. But they know how important it is to (expedite) their investigation.”

**When your customer came to you after finding this trait, how did you see it? Was this viewed as a minor issue that snowballed?**

“(The customer came to Riceland with concerns during) the second half of January... and indicated they’d found GM material and wanted an explanation.

“Anytime your customer has an issue, you pay close attention. Our response was the same one we’ve had for some time: there is no GM rice in commercial production. But they were confident (GM) material was there. And as it unfolded, their rice did test positive for... Bayer’s Liberty Link herbicide resistant trait.”

**So this was over a course of weeks that you were talking with this customer?**

“Yes, because we didn’t know what to look for. When I say, ‘herbicide resistant trait,’ it’s the same one that’s in Liberty Link corn, soybeans, canola, and cotton...”

“Since there was no known commercial production of GM rice, we thought it would be shown as fragments of soybeans or grain dust left in transportation systems. It’s in such minute quantities they couldn’t determine the material’s origin.

“We kept wondering what it could be. I compare it to looking in a haystack and not even knowing you’re looking for a needle. We didn’t know what to look for.”

“The last thing we expected is this was caused by GM rice. There was none being grown. We even looked at cotton bags — thinking maybe it was in the Liberty Link cotton fibers.”

RESOUR

**So it simply took that long to get it narrowed down to GM rice? Farmers are asking why they weren’t told about this before they planted their crop.**

“Yeah, there’s a good reason: no one knew. In June, we were finally thinking, ‘This looks like it could be Bayer’s product.’ So we talked with Bayer, sent them a sample and they began looking.

“It was July 31 when Bayer called us and told us what they’d found. They told us they were legally required to report their findings to USDA. They did that before (the 24 hour requirement) was up.

“There was input from the Securities Exchange Commission... because this was significant. They told us, ‘You’re not to talk about this.’ In fact, we weren’t even able to tell our salesmen.

“We worked with APHIS as they asked their initial questions. They had lots and we spent hours with them going through this. We’ve cooperated fully — and continue to — because this is impacting every segment of the rice industry. Of course, we’re especially concerned about the 9,000 (Riceland) farmers and stockholders of the co-op.”

**On charges and rumors...**

“I’ve heard charges made about (Riceland) — that we knew what this was in January. That’s just not true.

“Some have said, ‘They’re not telling us anything.’ The thing is, there are parts of this that are APHIS’ job... They’re the only ones that can do it. The investigation is APHIS’ (alone).

“Riceland is a rice marketer. We’re not genetic scientists.”

CONTINU

(New Co  
Weed R  
This cou  
wide ran  
to effecti  
weeds in  
reduce th  
resistanc  
manager  
licensed/  
(Florida,  
Carolina

**Take-aways...**

“There are two things to take away.

“First, FDA and USDA say this is trace and there are no health or safety concerns. That’s a message the farmers really need to hang on to. We’re known as a country with a good food-safety structure.

“Second, commerce continues — business as usual.”

e-mail: [dbennett@farmpress.com](mailto:dbennett@farmpress.com)

**Acceptable Use Policy**



**This cou**  
**Mexico,**  
**for CCA**  
**(New Co**  
**Spray Di**  
Keeping  
they are  
only to p  
allowing  
accredite  
critical el

### Add New Comment

Type your comment here.



Post as ...

[Back to Top](#)

### Showing 0 comments

Sort by Popular now [Subscribe by email](#) [Subscribe by RSS](#)

blog comments powered by [DISQUS](#)

Want to use this article? [Click here for options!](#) © 2010 Penton Media, Inc.

#### [Hopper Walker](#)

12-volt, remote-controlled swing-away hopper mover

[www.hopperwalker.com](http://www.hopperwalker.com)

#### [Richiger Grain Bagger](#)

Store up to 312 tons of grain. See flexible grain bagging options here

[www.bagyourgrain.com](http://www.bagyourgrain.com)

#### [Pruess Elevator, Inc.](#)

We pay top dollar for damaged grain; vacs and trucks available.

[www.pruesselevator.com/](http://www.pruesselevator.com/)

#### [Kill Duckweed](#)

1 Application up to 2 Years Control Real Customer Service from the Pros

[www.lakelawnandpond.com](http://www.lakelawnandpond.com)

Ads by

#### LATEST JOBS

#### BROWSE PRINT ISSUES

Select an Issue

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**FARM PRESS DAILY**  
[Subscribe](#)

**SOUTHEAST FARM PRESS**  
[www.southeastfarmpress.com](http://www.southeastfarmpress.com)

**SOUTHWEST FARM PRESS**  
[www.southwestfarmpress.com](http://www.southwestfarmpress.com)

