

EU Votes To End Destination Testing Requirement – Great Victory For USA Rice

ARLINGTON, VA.

USA Rice Federation officials called the decision to remove the requirement for mandatory testing of U.S. long-grain rice for the presence of genetically engineered (GE) traits at the first point of entry into the European Union (EU) as a “victory” for the U.S. rice industry.

“Removing mandatory destination testing in the EU is the single most important step necessary for the restoration of the EU market for U.S. long-grain rice,” USA Rice Chairman Al Montna said today. “Destination testing creates tremendous risk and uncertainty for U.S. shippers and EU customers and, as a result, has had the effect of slowing trade to a trickle.”

The decision by the Standing Committee of the Food Chain and Animal Health – which could come into effect as early as mid-January, 2008 – followed the recommendation by staff of EU Health and Consumer Protection Directorate General (DG-SANCO). At issue was the mandatory testing imposed on U.S. long-grain rice shipments following the August 18, 2006, announcement that trace amounts of genetically engineered Bayer CropScience Liberty Link (LL) rice were found in the U.S. commercial supply.

USA Rice Senior VP Bob Cummings yesterday presented the results of the U.S. rice industry’s yearlong remediation efforts to remove the LL traits from the commercial supply to the EC standing committee in Brussels. Cummings was joined by Carl Brothers, senior VP Riceland Foods and chairman of USA Rice’s International Trade Policy Committee; Marvin Baden, senior VP Producers’ Rice Mill and chairman of USA Rice’s EU Trade Policy Subcommittee; and Hartwig Schmidt, USA Rice regional director. USDA representatives from the U.S. Mission to the European Union in Brussels also attended the meeting.

“USA Rice appreciates the help it has received from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards

Administration (GIPSA) on this matter,” USA Rice President and CEO Betsy Ward said today. “FAS and GIPSA officials were instrumental in negotiating a rice sampling and testing protocol with the European Commission, efforts that are at the core of removing the destination testing requirement,” Ward said.

“No other industry faced with the unintentional release of a GE trait has made the commitment and taken such comprehensive actions to meet the regulatory and consumer demands of its customers,” Ward said.

Cummings explained the decision: “DG SANCO is recommending the lifting of the current mandatory inspection requirement on imports of U.S. long-grain rice because the U.S. rice industry has in place a robust action plan to remove the LL traits from the commercial long-grain supply, and because of the successful implementation of this plan in connection with the 2007 crop.

“Additionally, the EU Commission (in the form of DG SANCO) and the U.S. government (USDA/GIPSA) have agreed on a sampling and testing protocol for U.S. long-grain rice destined for the EU that meets EU standards and that provides direct involvement by USDA in the sampling of rice to be exported to the EU. Both the US and the EU have agreed on the test to be performed on this rice and on the list of laboratories in the U.S. eligible to perform the test.”

“Exports of U.S. long-grain rice to the EU were 282,000 metric tons (MT) in the 2005/06 marketing year prior to the discovery of the LL traits. Exports were 50,000 MT in 2006/2007,” Cummings said.

“The EU decision means that the U.S. rice industry is now clearly on a path for normalizing trade with the EU and other world markets affected by the unintended Liberty Link presence,” Montna said. “This is the result of more than a year of diligent work within the U.S. rice industry to eliminate the Liberty Link traits from the commercial rice supply, and the industry will need to continue its vigilance.” Δ