

Research Leads To Bird Repellent Approval For Rice Fields

CROWLEY, LA.

LSU AgCenter research funded by Louisiana rice farmers' checkoff funds led to federal approval of a bird repellent, AV-1011, that prevents birds from eating rice seed once it is planted.

Without this research, the AV-1011 would not have gotten approval by the Environmental Protection Agency, according to Steve Linscombe, director of the LSU AgCenter Rice Research Station.

Linscombe said birds quickly learn not to use planted rice fields for a quick meal.

"It doesn't taste good, so they don't eat the rice," Linscombe said, adding that the chemical doesn't hurt the birds.

Linscombe said EPA approval was given for 40,000 acres of seed planted in dry fields and 15,000 acres of water-planted rice.

The biggest need for the repellent is in the areas of Vermilion, Jefferson Davis and Cameron parishes, which are near the marshy blackbird roosting areas.

Swarms of blackbirds can devastate a rice field, causing farmers to have to use valuable time to go back into a field that had already been planted and spend money on more seed and fuel. Economic loss in 2008 was estimated at \$38.1 million based on the 2008 value of the crop in the rice-growing states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, Mississippi, Missouri and California.

"AgCenter scientists provided quite a bit of research and assistance in the justification for approval of the AV1011," Linscombe said.

Don Reed, AgCenter wildlife extension agent, did much of the work, Linscombe said.

Linscombe said use of the material was granted by EPA under a Section 18 permit that

has been obtained annually through application by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry. Efforts are under way to obtain permanent EPA approval, Linscombe said.

Johnny Saichuk, AgCenter rice specialist, said he spoke at an EPA hearing in 2012 in North Carolina to help obtain the Section 18 permit this year. The trip was funded by the Louisiana Rice Research Board with checkoff funds, Saichuk said.

The checkoff program was approved by rice farmers again last year. They pay a total of 8 cents for every 100 pounds of rice they sell, and 5 cents goes to research and 3 cents for promotion.

Saichuk said a number of materials have been tested to prevent birds from eating rice seed, without affecting the birds. "This is the only thing that showed any promise."

The bird repellent is authorized for use on seed of other crops, such as corn.

Paul Johnson, who farms in Cameron Parish, said he estimated his war against blackbirds, using propane-powered pop guns and shotguns, cost him an average of \$70 an acre.

"It was a big, big eye-opener for me when I started adding all that up," he recalled. "Even with all that, I still had damage to areas of fields. The one thing that wasn't figured in there was peace of mind."

He said after planting a 70-acre field last year, hordes of blackbirds descended on the seed. "For three days, we could not leave the field. All we were doing was shooting."

He said he eventually abandoned the field and let the blackbirds have the seed, but he followed up by planting seed treated with AV-1011. "Within three hours, there was not a blackbird in the field." △



The blackbirds eat the rice seed, destroying the rice field.
Photos by Johnny Saichuk



Blackbirds can swarm onto a rice field and destroy it, causing a farmer to have to go back in and replant or abandon the field.