



THE CENTER FOR
FOOD SAFETY



KANSAS RURAL CENTER

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Genetically Engineered Pharmaceutical Rice Is Not the Solution to Diarrhea

Drugs in Rice Not Approved by FDA, Will Likely Contaminate Foods

Groups Urge Ban on All Drug-Producing Genetically Engineered Food Crops

WASHINGTON — Genetically engineered, pharmaceutical rice is not a safe or cost-effective solution for infants suffering from diarrhea, concludes an exhaustive report released today by the Center for Food Safety, as the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) considers whether to allow planting of the rice in Kansas this spring. The report discusses potential adverse health impacts of the rice-grown drugs, which have not been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Developed by California-based Ventria Bioscience, the rice is engineered with modified human genes to serve as a “biofactory” for production of synthetic human milk proteins that have antimicrobial and other drug-like properties. Ventria has proposed using the rice-extracted protein drugs to treat infants with diarrhea, and as additives in infant formulas, yogurt, granola bars and sports drinks, among other uses.

The report details Ventria’s failed attempts to gain FDA approval of its rice-grown drugs dating back to November 2003. Ventria is seeking USDA approval to grow up to 3,200 acres of its rice in the Junction City, Kansas area.

“USDA must not allow Ventria to grow genetically-engineered rice containing drugs that our nation’s food and drug authority have refused to approve,” said Joseph Mendelson, Legal Director at Center for Food Safety (CFS). “We call on USDA to unconditionally deny Ventria’s permits.”

“Policy makers in Kansas do not seem to have a sense of either the marginal benefits to be gained or the high risks entailed in this enterprise,” said Dan Nagengast, Executive Director of the Kansas Rural Center. “Clearly the food industry, and rice farmers elsewhere in the country, understand the risk to their businesses when contamination occurs.” He noted that rice supplies roughly 20% of the world’s calories.

Nagengast also pointed out that the USA Rice Federation, representing the rice industry, had asked USDA ‘in the strongest possible terms’ to deny Ventria’s requested permits. The Grocery

Manufacturers of America and other groups representing the \$500 billion food industry have also opposed drug-producing food crops.

“These genetically engineered drugs could exacerbate certain infections, or cause dangerous allergic or immune system reactions,” added Bill Freese, CFS Science Policy Analyst and author of the report, which references peer-reviewed scientific articles, the National Academy of Sciences, and FDA regulatory documents.

Freese notes that mothers of two infants who participated in a Ventria-sponsored clinical trial of its rice-grown drugs in Peru reported that their children had developed allergic reactions to numerous foods, leading to a Peruvian government investigation of the trial.

“USDA simply cannot be trusted to keep this pharmaceutical rice out of our foods,” said Nagengast. “Just a few years ago, corn containing an experimental swine vaccine got mixed into soybeans and regular corn, which then had to be destroyed. Rice has twice been contaminated with unapproved genetically engineered rice in just the past year,” he added.

The report also disputes the need for Ventria’s pharmaceutical rice, and discusses cheap and effective solutions for prevention and treatment of diarrhea recommended by the World Health Organization and other public health experts. The report notes that these existing solutions have cut deaths due to diarrhea from 4.6 million a year in 1980 to 2 million today, but are not adequately funded.

“What developing countries need most is clean water and basic sanitation facilities to prevent diarrhea, and improved access to existing oral rehydration solutions to treat it,” said Freese. “Even if Ventria’s rice-grown drugs eventually prove to be safe, they would be expensive, and divert funding from existing, cost-effective solutions that aren’t adequately funded,” he added.

For the full report, go to

<http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/pubs/Pharmaceutical%20Rice-FINAL.pdf>

Center for Food Safety is a national non-profit membership organization working to protect human health and the environment by curbing the use of harmful food production technologies and promoting sustainable agriculture. In 2000/2001, CFS was part of a coalition that discovered widespread contamination of the food supply with genetically engineered StarLink corn, which had not been approved for human consumption due to concerns it could cause food allergies. In the past year, CFS has won three cases against USDA for the Agriculture Department’s reckless and illegal approval of genetically engineered crops. www.centerforfoodsafety.org.

The Kansas Rural Center is a non-profit research, education and advocacy organization that promotes environmentally sound farming practices and a safe and healthy food system, benefiting both farmers and consumers. www.kansasruralcenter.org.