



# THE CENTER FOR FOOD SAFETY

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660 PENNSYLVANIA AVE., SE, SUITE 302, WASHINGTON, DC 20003  
(202) 547-9359 FAX (202) 547-9429  
2601 MISSION STREET, SUITE 803, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94110  
(415) 826-2770 FAX (415) 826-0507  
WWW.CENTERFORFOODSAFETY.ORG

## CONTAMINATION EPISODES WITH GENETICALLY ENGINEERED CROPS\*

The following are just a few of the dozens of episodes in which pollen or seeds from genetically engineered (GE) crops have contaminated conventional crops, often causing seed or product recalls, and other problems for farmers and consumers.

*August 2006* — Bayer CropScience and Riceland Foods report widespread contamination of commercial long-grain rice supplies, including exports, with Bayer's unapproved, herbicide-tolerant GE rice, LL601. Japan immediately suspends imports of US long-grain rice and orders testing of processed rice products that might contain it. Since Bayer stopped field-testing the rice in 2001, it has likely been in the rice seed supply, the food chain and/or the environment for 5 years or more.

*August 2006* --- EPA scientists announce that golfcourse grass (i.e. bentgrass) genetically engineered to withstand Monsanto's Roundup herbicide escaped the test plot via pollen flow or seed dispersal to form viable plants up to 2.4 miles away. Bentgrass can cross-pollinate with many different grasses, and 175 permits authorizing cultivation of over 4,400 acres of GE bentgrass have been issued since 1993.

*December 2004* — Biotech giant Syngenta reveals to U.S. authorities that it had mistakenly distributed an unapproved GE corn variety, Bt10, to U.S. farmers from 2001 to 2004. Enough Bt10 to plant 37,000 acres and produce 165,000 tons was distributed. The episode resulted in numerous rejected corn shipments to Japan and the EU. Bt10 remains unapproved by US regulatory authorities.

*September 2004* --- In the longest "gene flow" incident on record, genetically engineered bentgrass (see above) was found by EPA scientists to have cross-pollinated conventional grass up to 13 miles away in Oregon. The Forest Service and Nature Conservancy report that bentgrass can displace natural grass species in forest and native prairie settings. Herbicide-resistant bentgrass weeds created by such cross-pollination could also endanger the grass seed industry.

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\* Revised and updated from: BRIEFING ON THE PROPOSED PROTOCOL FOR PHARMACEUTICAL RICE, Attachment 2, Submitted to the AB2622 Advisory Board of the California Rice Commission, March 5, 2004, Prepared by Californians for GE-Free Agriculture

*December 2003* — UC Davis researchers discover that, for seven years, they had been mistakenly distributing for research purposes GE tomato seed in place of a conventional variety.

*July 2003* — Over 100 farmers in Italy discover that the non-GE corn seed they planted was contaminated with an unapproved GE variety.

*May 2003* — Tests show that biotech crops have contaminated wheat grown in the US, even though GE wheat is not approved for marketing. Grain industry experts warn that approving GE wheat could mean the end of US exports to Europe and Asia.

*September 2002* — An experimental corn variety genetically engineered as a “biofactory” for drug-production, produced by ProdiGene, Inc. of Texas, contaminates corn and soybean fields in Iowa and Nebraska. 155 acres of corn is destroyed and 250,000 bushels of contaminated soybeans worth \$3 million are quarantined at the elevator and destroyed.

*April 2002* — Corn grown in Argentina and sold as corn flour in Europe is discovered contaminated with a GE variety that is not approved for planting in Argentina or for human consumption in Europe.

*Sept 2001* — Scientists were surprised to discover GE crop material in wild maize in Oaxaca, Mexico despite the country’s moratorium on GE crop cultivation, in effect since 1998. It is thought that GE maize seed in food aid shipments from the US was saved and planted.

*July 2001* — Austrian authorities order thousands of acres of corn destroyed when tests show contamination of non-GE seed by two unapproved GE corn varieties.

*April 2001* — Just months after the StarLink fiasco, Monsanto is forced to recall thousands of bags of canola seed contaminated with a GE variety not approved for sale to Canada’s major export markets. Incineration is planned for over 10,000 acres of fields already planted with the unapproved crop.

*September 2000* — Over 300 food products were recalled due to contamination by a GE corn (StarLink, produced by Aventis CropScience), not approved for human food due to concerns that it might trigger hazardous food allergies. Experts estimated that half of the state’s corn — about 1 billion bushels — could be contaminated. Exports of corn to Japan decreased by 44% in one year. StarLink contamination is still being discovered in US corn shipments three years later.

*May 2000* — Nearly 15,000 acres of farmland in five European countries are contaminated with unapproved GE canola when pollen from the unapproved variety blows into a non-GE seed producers’ field. In addition, French authorities reveal that unapproved GE seeds have contaminated nearly 10,000 acres of corn planted there.

*December 1997* — Unapproved GE sugar beet from a Monsanto test field is sent to a sugar refiner, where it contaminates natural sugar sold for animal feed.

*May 1997* — Monsanto is forced to recall 60,000 bags of canola seed when it discovers the seed contains unapproved gene-altered DNA, due to contamination from a planting error by a seed producer.