

## Embrapa against cultivation of transgenic rice

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<http://clippingmp.planejamento.gov.br/cadastrros/noticias/2009/3/19/embrapa-manifesta-se-contra-o-plantio-de-arroz-transgenico>

translated by Irina Maia, GENET

São Paulo, 19 March 2009 - For the first time since the beginning of the discussions on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Brazil, the Brazilian Research Company on Agriculture and Husbandry (Embrapa) raised its voice against the cultivation of a transgenic variety.

On a public hearing about the transgenic rice "Liberty Link", produced by the German multinational Bayer, Embrapa classified the approval of this seed as a "threat to the food safety in Brazil" and recommended to the National Technical Commission of Biosafety (CTNBio) to "analyze carefully the introduction of genes" of resistance to herbicides based on ammonium glufosinate.

Representing the executive-directorate of this state company, the researcher Flávio Breseghello stated that the transgene of this rice would cause "even bigger agronomical problems in the country" if it was released now in the environment.

Embrapa sustains that the gene would transform the much feared red rice weed into a superweed resistant to herbicides. "The transgenic red rice would become dominant with the use of this herbicide (glufosinate) and could harm the Brazilian wild rice varieties", said Breseghello. "After cultivation it will be impossible to remove this gene from the environment. There's no possibility of recalling this technology".

The researcher of Embrapa "Rice and Beans", located in Goiás, defended that the combination of glufosinate with the "clearfield" technology, which has been utilized to exterminate the red rice weed, would have the opposite effect and would lead to the resistance of this weed to both herbicides. The "technical and not ideological" position, as Breseghello pointed out three times, caused surprise to the small auditorium of the Deputies Chamber, where around 130 people gathered for four hours to listen to the specialists.

Even more surprising was the position against this rice from the rice producers, in theory the most interested people in the eventual advantages of its commercial release. "We are not favourable to the release of this rice at the moment. There's no market for the transgenic rice and exports are vital for us", said the president of the federation of rice producers (Federarroz), Renato Rocha. By announcing a joint position with the state federation of agriculture (Farsul) and the research institute Irga, the spokesman stated that the "release would put at risk the internal and external market and would compromise the profitability of the production chain" by impeding exports, since no other country in the world authorized the cultivation of this transgenic rice. In 2008 the country exported 790 thousand tons of rice.

The manager of Bayer technology, André Abreu, defended the economic and environmental benefits of this transgenic variety. According to him, "Liberty Link" reduces the residues on the soil and does not contaminate the water used for irrigation. "It would be a great step forward to use it in irrigated areas because of the rate of degradability of the product". "But we will only make it available when the producers find it is the right time". The executive also defended the risk evaluation studies conducted in Rio Grande do Sul and rejected accusations that part of the research data delivered to CTNBio were suppressed.

During the hearing, independent experts underlined the flaws and inconsistencies of the studies presented to the European Commission. "There's no technical basis because data

from field testing is lacking”, said Gabriel Fernandes, from the environmental NGO ASPTA. The president of CTNBio, the biochemical doctor Walter Colli, stated that this transgenic rice would be similar to the technology ”clearfield” already in use in the Brazilian rice production: ”There’s already clearfield doing the same job that a GMO does, but nobody is talking about it. That is my conclusion”.

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Comment by TraceConsult™: It is an entirely new tune we get to hear from Embrapa <<http://www.embrapa.br/english>> , Brazil’s prestigious, semi-governmental, yet state-owned, corporation affiliated to the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, which is devoted to pure and applied research on agriculture. Not only has it developed an acidic-soil adapted soybean plant, which may help Brazil to become the world’s number one soybean exporter, it also serves as a multiplier for all types and varieties of seeds, including GM soybeans developed by international suppliers. Its mission is to provide feasible solutions for the sustainable development of Brazilian agribusiness through knowledge and technology generation and transfer. To hear an Embrapa spokesman utter the words ”... transgenic red rice would become dominant with the use of this herbicide (glufosinate) and could harm the Brazilian wild rice varieties” can truly be called a rare occasion and may be considered a field day by some environmental NGOs. At the same time it means that food producers should listen up and review such statements for compatibility with their own guidelines for sustainable and ethical production. Nobody knows Brazil’s agriculture as well as this organization with more than 8,000 staff in almost 40 research centers throughout Brazil. That is undoubtedly the reason why Valor Econômico has covered this story.