

Amberwaves Calls for a Moratorium on Genetically Engineered Rice Following Destruction of 5 Millions Pounds of GE Rice in Texas

Becket, Mass., May 24, 2001- Amberwaves, a network of concerned citizens, families, farms, and businesses devoted to preserving natural and organic rice and wheat from the potential hazards of genetic engineering, supported the decision of Aventis Cropscience to destroy 5 million pounds of Liberty Rice this week in Texas, the first genetically engineered (GE) rice produced in the United States. The grassroots organization, with branches from sea to shining sea, has asked for a moratorium on growing GE rice, wheat, and other grains and called upon the nation's major food producers to pledge not to use GE staples in their products, pending comprehensive studies of the impact of GE grains on human health and the environment.

“America's destiny is intertwined with preserving amber waves of grain, spacious skies, and other expressions of natural beauty,” stated Alex Jack, president of Amberwaves and a teacher and author based in western Massachusetts. “GE rice threatens to contaminate conventional and organic crops, release potentially harmful organisms into the environment, and imperil the livelihood of America's farmers and their families.”

“GE rice also threatens wildlife,” continues Jack, a faculty member of the Kushi Institute and author of *Imagine a World Without Monarch Butterflies: Awakening to the Hazards of Genetically-Altered Foods* and over twenty-five books on diet, health, and the environment. “Nearly 200 species of animals live in America's rice fields, including 141 species of birds, 28 mammals, and 24 amphibians and reptiles. Thirty of these species are threatened or endangered. No other crop in the world provides benefit for so much wildlife as rice.”

Liberty Rice (also known as LibertyLink) is made by Aventis, the same company that introduced StarLink Corn, the unapproved GE corn that inadvertently got into the human food chain last year and is reportedly contaminating conventional and organic corn around the country. While approved for human consumption by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Liberty Rice was treated with glufosinate (which carries the trade name Liberty), an herbicide that has not been approved for rice (though it has been approved for corn, cotton, and rapeseed) by the Environmental Protection Agency. Aventis said that it could have kept the rice in storage pending approval by the EPA, but according to Peg Cherny, a company spokesperson, Aventis “didn't want to create an issue”. Nor have foreign countries approved Liberty Rice, and Aventis worried that it might be held liable if it were shipped overseas. This week, 95 truckloads of Liberty Rice, containing 2272 metric tons, will be buried in a landfill in southeast Texas.

“While Aventis made the right decision not to release the crop, the Liberty debacle in Texas raises serious environmental questions,” adds educator Edward Esko, vice president of Amberwaves and author of *Healing Planet Earth*. “Like nuclear waste, contaminated crops must be disposed of properly.”

Amberwaves' new book, *Saving Organic Rice*, edited by Jack and Esko, includes articles by Dr. Vandana Shiva, the Indian scientist; Dr. Mae-Wan Ho, the British geneticist; Paul Hawken, the social activist and author of *Natural Capitalism*, and other prominent scientists and educators on the potentially harmful effects of GE rice. These include reduced nutrition, increased vitamin A toxicity, increased allergens and toxins, use of increased pesticides and chemicals, emergence of new disease-resistant weeds, emergence of new viral diseases, loss of biodiversity, and a threat to sustainable agriculture.

Until now, Amberwaves' main focus has been protecting natural rice in the Sacramento Valley in California, where 80% of the organic rice in the United States is produced. Monsanto and other biotech companies have announced plans to convert up to half of the rice in California to GE varieties in the next decade. Last summer, Greenpeace issued a special environmental report, *California at the Crossroads*, that warned, "If current trends in the genetic engineering of California's major export crops continue, the state's producers could be facing . . . the potential collapse of its organic food industry."

Amberwaves board member Michael Potter, chairman and president of Eden Foods, a pioneer natural foods company based in Michigan, contends that "it is arrogant to think that a scientist can make food better by manipulating DNA. It is far more likely that this tampering will limit the expression of the genetic potentialities of life. Recklessly releasing new man-made, untested organisms into our environment may lead to surprising, devastating results, and has already caused enormous economic damage."

Amberwaves is currently circulating a petition that calls upon every American to declare his or her opposition to GE grains and "preserve natural rice, wheat, and other essential foods for my children, grandchildren, and future generations. Through my food choices, I will strive to keep America and the planet beautiful, healthy, and peaceful."

"Surveys consistently show that the vast majority of the American people want GE foods to be properly regulated, tested, and labeled," Alex Jack concluded. "Amber waves of grain or altered waves of grain. The choice is up to us."

Copies of *Saving Organic Rice* are available for \$6.95 each plus \$3.00 postage and handling from Amberwaves, P.O. Box 487, Becket, MA 01223, Tel/fax (413) 623- 6042.

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