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Rice Food

Safety & other Facts

Newsletter Nr. 5

28th Nov 2008

FOOD SAFETY

- Rapid Alert System

Following consumer complaint on Nov 21st a notification was sent on by Germany concerning foreign body (several foreign bodies of different constituencies) in parboiled rice from Italy.

Source: RASFF weekly Overview nr. 47

- The Japanese government plans to require retailers and restaurants to specify **country of origin for rice products** that they sell, after finding that some Japanese traders sold pesticide-tainted imported rice for edible purposes. The plan meets consumers' desire to identify whether products are made from domestic or foreign rice in the wake of the recent finding, said the officials in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. It would be the first time for restaurants in Japan to be required to specify country of origin for meals.

Source: beta.irri.org/news

ORGANIC FOOD

The **international organic market** is growing by approx. 5 billion US dollars a year. Its volume in 2007 topped 40 billion US dollars for the first time, reports Organic Monitor. 30.4 million hectares of land throughout the world are farmed organically. Australia has the largest area of organic farming land with 12.3 million ha, followed by China (2.3 million ha), Argentina (2.2 million ha) and the USA (1.6 million ha). Current figures for the beginning of September 2008, which cover about half the European countries, confirm approx. 7% growth. Altogether some 8 million ha of land in Europe are farmed using organic methods. The positive development, especially in the young organic markets in Central and Eastern Europe, is frequently due to dedicated retailers, who create vital impetus by setting up shops in the metropolitan areas. International players in the conventional retail food trade like Carrefour also stimulate growth and sell their organic products under their own labels in almost all countries.

Source: www.biofach.de/en/press/ars12

GMO & BIOTECH

Many varieties of transgenic rice are under development in countries where wild and weedy relatives co-occur with the crop. To evaluate possible risks associated with pollen-mediated transgene dispersal, a team of researchers conducted a two-year survey in Vietnam to examine **overlapping flowering periods of rice (*Oryza sativa* L.), weedy rice (*O. sativa*), and wild rice (*O. rufipogon* Griff.)**, all of which are inter-fertile. Weedy rice frequently flowered simultaneously with neighboring cultivated rice plants: the longer flowering season of wild rice ensured that crop-to-wild gene flow was possible in several habitats. The second objective of the study was to determine whether wild and weedy rice populations are exposed to pests that could be targeted by future transgenes, which may then provide fitness benefits. These populations shared many pathogen and insect herbivore species with cultivated rice. Indicator species analysis revealed that most of the insect herbivores were associated with particular habitats, demonstrating the importance of broad geographic sampling for transgenic rice risk assessment. These survey data and the strong likelihood of gene flow from cultivated rice suggest that further studies are needed to examine the effects of transgenic traits such as resistance to pests on the abundance of wild and weedy rice.

Source: Environ. Biosafety Res. 7 (2008) 73-85

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SCIENCE & RESEARCH

A new farming method first developed to conserve irrigation water may have the added benefit of producing rice containing much less **arsenic** than rice grown using traditional methods. A team of UK researchers discovered that arsenic contamination of irrigation water was more important than soil contamination in increasing arsenic levels in rice. Arsenic has been linked to cancer and other diseases and it accumulates in much higher concentrations in rice than other staple grain crops. Using global arsenic data, other researchers from USA classified rice into two types, where the predominant arsenic forms were either organic or the more toxic inorganic forms. They found that rice from the USA largely contains organic arsenic, which is less easily absorbed into the body and excreted more rapidly than inorganic arsenic. Rice contaminated with inorganic arsenic prevails in Asia and Europe. The study suggests that breeding new rice varieties that convert inorganic arsenic to organic arsenic would be an important risk reduction strategy, especially for countries with arsenic contaminated environments and high rice consumption rates.

Source: www.sciencedaily.com

LAWS, STANDARDS & AGREEMENTS

The European Commission welcomes the **political agreement** by EU agriculture ministers on the **Health Check of the CAP**. The Health Check will modernise, simplify and streamline the CAP and remove restrictions on farmers, thus helping them to respond better to signals from the market. The agreement abolishes arable set-aside, increases milk quotas gradually leading up to their abolition in 2015, and converts market intervention into a genuine safety net. Ministers also agreed to increase modulation, whereby direct payments to farmers are reduced and the money transferred to the Rural Development Fund. This will allow a better response to the new challenges and opportunities faced by European agriculture, including climate change, the need for better water management, the protection of biodiversity, and the production of green energy.

Source: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1749

OTHER NEWS

Food scientists at University of Minnesota have discovered why **Rice Krispies** make their characteristic sound when soaked in milk. Rice Krispies contain lots of sugar and are cooked at high temperature, which makes the sugar form crystals and creates air-filled cavities. When a Krispie absorbs milk, the capillary forces push the air to shatter the cavities' walls and make a noise. When the cereal becomes saturated and soggy, the crackling sound stops. The Krispies' bubbles are about 20-times bigger than those in puffed rice cereal.

Source: www.sciencedaily.com

EVENTS & MEETINGS

- The **Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)** holds its Annual General Meeting in Maputo, Mozambique, from December 1 to 5, 2008. The meeting brings together over 700 of the world's leading food and environmental scientists and civil society to strengthen and expand partnerships that stimulate economic growth in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Participants will explore how agricultural research, science and technology, and food policy initiatives can better improve the lives and livelihoods of poor people, and launch new initiatives that bring the benefits of modern science quicker and faster to poor farmers.

Source: www.cgiar.org