



FLAX COUNCIL OF CANADA

GMO Flax Update #1 REVISED

28 September 2009

The Flax Council of Canada will be issuing regular GMO Flax Updates to keep producers and industry informed on the actions being taken to resolve the current GMO flax issue. The notices are posted on the Flax Council of Canada's web page: www.flaxcouncil.ca. Further information can be obtained by contacting Barry Hall, President, Flax Council of Canada at flax@flaxcouncil.ca

Issue:

- GMO material has been discovered in Canadian flax shipments to Europe
- Europe has not authorized any GMO flax events
- Europe has a zero tolerance policy for events not authorized in Europe
- Most Canadian flax in Europe is currently quarantined
- European laboratories claim the GMO material is FP967, commonly known as Triffid
- Triffid cannot be confirmed until an event specific test for Triffid has been developed and proven

Problem:

- Zero tolerance of unauthorized events in countries of import creates unnecessary and dramatic increases in consumer costs, reductions in producer prices and prevention of consumer access to critical supplies. This results when safe technologies are met with zero tolerances due to a lack of official authorizations
- Once an event is authorized in country of export it is only a matter of time before trace levels of the event will appear in international shipments through commingling within international shipping systems
- This unintentional commingling may occur with the seed, on the farm, or within the global handling and transportation systems as the grain is produced and moved between buyers and sellers
- Therefore the presence of GMO material will occur in all transboundary shipments of all commodities (both GMOs and Non-GMOs) shipped from countries with GMOs in commercial production
- European zero tolerance policies have also placed US soybean shipments in quarantine because of trace levels of **unauthorized** GMO events discovered from corn dust in the shipments
- No bulk handling system, no identity preserved system, no channeling system can manage these events to zero tolerance
- Today's tests can detect the presence of GM material in one in 10,000 seeds

Canadian GMO Flax Background

- In the late 1990's a flax variety, known as FP967 and later named Triffid was developed by a public research institution, the Crop Development Centre in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
- Triffid underwent full food, feed and environmental risk assessment analysis and was approved and authorized by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)
- Triffid underwent full food, feed and environmental risk assessment analysis and was approved and authorized in the United States
- Triffid certified seed was never sold to produce flax for food, feed or for processing
- The Flax Council of Canada, in one of the most sophisticated and extensive risk management plans ever adopted, acquired all of the certified seed produced and had it destroyed or crushed domestically
- The Flax Council's actions were taken to protect the European market by ensuring that no GMO flax was being produced in Canada
- Triffid was de-registered by CFIA in 2001
- The recent discovery of GMO markers is the first occasion where GMO material has been found in Canadian flax shipments

Highlights of Flax Council Actions to Address European GMO Flax Issue

- The CFIA has confirmed that Triffid flax is safe for food, feed and processing
- The Flax Council considers the GMO flax issue to be a very serious issue and has placed the resumption of flax trade to Europe as its highest priority
- Europe represents about 70% of Canada's flax exports
- The Flax Council has created a Flax Risk Management Team and a number of Working Groups that are working closely with the Canadian Government
- The Plant Biotechnology Institute (PBI) in Saskatoon is developing a Triffid specific test, which when developed, will be sent to Flax Council selected laboratories around the world
- The CFIA is testing certified flax seed stock. To date no positive GMO results have been found
- The Canadian Grain Commission is undertaking a geographic study of existing flax stocks held in commercial positions throughout Canada
- All Canadian companies are participating in the study and are sending appropriate samples from their facilities
- The Commission study will determine the nature and location of the GMO material
- The Commission is also expanding its traditional harvest survey of this year's flax crop to determine whether or not there is any GMO material in this year's crop, and if so, where it is located

Canadian Government/European Commission Talks

- Canadian Government officials met with representatives from DG SANCO (Department of Health) of the European Commission on Thursday 23rd September
- The European Commission confirmed that there were no GM linseeds authorized in the EU and hence there was a zero tolerance for its presence
- The Canadian officials confirmed that both the Canadian Government and Canadian industry were taking this matter very seriously

- Canadian officials also confirmed that FP967, commonly known as Triffid is still authorized for food and feed purposes (as well as an environmental release) although it cannot be sold as seed for planting
- The two governments agreed to co-operate on testing and detection methods and CFIA will forward reference material
- The EC will be discussing the flax issue at the 19th October meeting of the (GM Food and Feed and Environmental Risk section) of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health with the Member States
- It was agreed that Canada should propose a protocol for assuring that Canadian linseed shipments to the EU complied with EU requirements prior to the Oct 19 meeting
- The EC referred to the Rice Protocol and the sampling and testing provisions contained therein (A Protocol developed between the European Commission and the United States to facilitate US rice exports to the European Union)
- Canada indicated that it would examine the Rice Protocol more closely and looked forward to further discussions once more information on the potential scope of the issue became available
- The EC requested additional information on various aspects of the matter

Flax Council Next Steps

- Issue GMO Flax Updates and post them on its web page on a regular basis to keep industry abreast of recent developments
- Encourage Canadian Government to recommend to DG Sanco that a common protocol for the determination of Triffid be developed jointly by Canada's Plant Biotechnology Institute (PBI) and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC)
- Work with the Canadian Government to develop a Flax Protocol to resume flax trade with the European Union
- Work with CFIA and Canadian Grain Commission to determine the nature and scope of the GM material
- Implement appropriate risk management policies when the scope and nature of the GM material is known

Summary

- **The GMO flax issue is a serious problem that is causing significant financial hardship to both Canadian producers and industry and European industry and consumers**
- **The European Union must create a technical solution as an initial step to resolve its zero threshold issue.**
- **Canadian flax remains safe for food, feed and processing**
- **This is a regulatory issue, not a safety issue**
- **Once the nature and scope of the GM material is known the Flax Council will work with the Government of Canada to develop a risk management plan to meet European requirements**