

OIA24-0712

11 November 2024

Jon Muller  
secretary@gefrees.org.nz

Dear Jon,

Thank you for your email of 26 September 2024 requesting information relating to GM-contaminated rice imports. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

You requested the following:

*We have been alerted to the illegal contamination of an unapproved experimental GM370 rice variety, as reported in Rice News Today, in a consignment of Organic Basmati Rice. We ask if MPI had also detected this contamination? If not, we request that MPI looks into this as their duty of care for consumers and the integrity of the New Zealand food chain.*

- *Has the contamination of any unauthorised imported rice lines with genetically engineered or new breeding technologies (NBT) been detected by MPI?*
- *Has MPI monitored and investigated for validation that unauthorised GE, NBT rice has not contaminated the Rice supply?*
- *If not why not?*

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) is aware of the contaminated shipment reported by European Union officials you note in your request. New Zealand Food Safety (NZFS), a business unit within MPI, continually scans for overseas food safety issues, and when identified determines if an affected product is in New Zealand and poses a risk to New Zealand consumers.

NZFS can also be alerted to such events via inter-governmental networks such as the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) whereby member countries alert other countries about contaminated food exported to their country and report any food safety events of potential significance to the INFOSAN Secretariat. NZFS has not received an INFOSAN notification concerning this event.

Currently NZFS is not aware of any unauthorised genetically engineered or new breeding technology contaminated rice entering New Zealand.

The Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Food Standards Code) sets out requirements for the use of products produced by gene technology as food, in [Standard 1.5.2 - Food produced using gene technology](#). These requirements apply to both domestically produced and imported food sold as food in New Zealand. Registered food importers are responsible for ensuring the food they import is safe and suitable and meets all applicable requirements. They must conduct a safety and suitability assessment prior to importing the food to ensure it will be safe and suitable for sale in New Zealand.

NZFS does not currently monitor Food Standards Code requirements at the border, as many of these rules apply at the point of sale making it ineffective to apply requirements before products are sold. NZFS does have other regulatory tools, such as verification, to check importers are meeting compliance obligations, as well as powers to investigate and enforce requirements where there are concerns for public safety.

- *Will the laboratory tools for detection and validation of unauthorised GM products be equivalent to the EU ones?*
- *Please provide us with the types of detection and diagnostic tools you will be adopting for detection of “illegal” or unauthorised GE contamination?*

There are currently no New Zealand-based laboratories accredited by International Accreditation New Zealand to detect indicators of genetic modification in food and feed products sold in New Zealand. While there may be capability in some research laboratories, any analytical methods and monitoring programmes used for official assurances would need to be evaluated under a verification programme developed and funded through changes to New Zealand’s gene technology regulations.

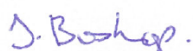
Under the Australia New Zealand Joint Food Regulation System, an Implementation Subcommittee for Food Regulation (ISFR) expert advisory group (EAG) comprising laboratory personnel and representatives of Australian and New Zealand jurisdictions, identifies and evaluates appropriate methods of analysis associated with all applications to Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), including those applications for food produced using gene technology. For genetically modified (GM) food applications, the EAG confirms that the full DNA sequence of the insert and adjacent genomic DNA are sufficient data to be provided for analytical purposes. Using this information, any analytical laboratory with molecular testing capability could develop or use a PCR-based detection method for genetically modified DNA. This sequence information is supplied by the applicant to FSANZ.

- *Could you provide us with the funding you have been allotted for the laboratory “omics” tools that would detect the presence of contamination from or illegal entry to the food chain from new breeding technologies.*

At present there is no funding allocated to laboratories for the monitoring of unpermitted breeding or GM technologies in food imports. Laboratory funding is aligned with the responsibilities for complying with relevant regulations, compliance monitoring programmes, and priority surveillance.

Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise these with the Ministry for Primary Industries at [Official.InformationAct@mpi.govt.nz](mailto:Official.InformationAct@mpi.govt.nz). Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143 or at [info@ombudsman.parliament.nz](mailto:info@ombudsman.parliament.nz).

Yours sincerely



Jenny Bishop  
**Director, Food Risk Management**