

Anti-GM activists say spread of genes from GM rice “slow but unavoidable”

GM crop genes, such as those designed for insect resistance, can spread through cross-pollination with wild plants surrounding farmers’ fields — an issue considered to be of major environmental concern, as little is known of the ecological consequences of such gene spread.

But a study by Chinese scientists has found that gene flow of this type is unlikely to occur rapidly, as the transferred genes — or ‘transgenes’ — do not actually enhance the survival of wild plants. This is because the number of insect pests would have already been reduced in the local area due to the GM crops’ insect-resistant genes.

The researchers from Fudan University and the Fujian Academy of Agricultural Sciences crossed a rice strain that had been genetically modified to carry an insect-resistant gene with a wild, ‘weedy rice’ strain, and then tested the survival of their progeny four generations later in an experimental field setting in Fuzhou, in Fujian Province, China.

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