

Audit: USDA regulators don't consider past non-compliance when approving biotech field trials

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USDA's biotechnology regulators don't take past non-compliance problems into account when approving new field trials for regulated genetically engineered crops, according to an internal audit.

The agency's Office of Inspector General found that eight unnamed biotech developers continued to be allowed to conduct field trials despite 260 non-compliance incidents over the past two years.

Companies and universities are allowed to test biotech crops in the field as long as they follow protocols to prevent the escape of traits that haven't been deregulated by USDA.

The agency either issues permits to biotech developers or, under a streamlined process, acknowledges their notifications that field trials will occur.

Auditors found one instance where an organization was repeatedly allowed to conduct field trials even though it was cited for 122 incidents, including failing to "devitalize" the crops, having the crops persist in the environment and moving them without authorization.

"Biotechnologists were not, however, using this compliance history when they reviewed and approved new applications for permits and notifications," the audit said.

Officials from the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service told auditors that if they're aware of past problems, the biotech developers may be subject to stricter field trials requirements or encouraged to withdraw their applications.

In response to the audit, APHIS said that staff members who oversee the compliance program have begun meeting with personnel responsible for issuing permits and acknowledging notifications. The agency also agreed to begin considering non-compliance problems when approving field trials.

The Center for Food Safety, a non-profit that's critical of USDA's biotech oversight, is disturbed such problems still haven't been fixed 10 years after a similarly critical audit was released by the OIG.

Read full, original post: [Audit: USDA disregards GMO field trial problems](#)