

USA: FDA APPROVES SECOND GENERATION OF SIMPLOT GMO SPUDS

in

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SUMMARY: "J.R. Simplot Co.'s second-generation Innate potato has been approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration."

The J.R. Simplot Co. announced Jan. 13 it has obtained federal Food and Drug Administration approval for the second generation of its Innate line of potatoes, developed with biotechnology.

The company plans to raise less than 100 acres of second-generation Innate Russet Burbanks this season in anticipation of approval by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which is expected by December and would represent the final step in the review process.

Innate's second generation was previously approved by USDA, and the company voluntarily sought FDA approval, said Simplot spokesman Doug Cole.

"(FDA approval) is something most all biotech companies will go through because it gives customers an assurance of safety," Cole said. "We will pursue it for all of our various (Innate) generations."

Innate lines utilize genes introduced through biotechnology from wild and cultivated potatoes, which has led to concerns by some in the industry that the product could affect foreign trade markets where consumers are wary of genetically modified organisms. The first generation of Innate, which offered low bruising, non-browning and low acrylamide, was approved by FDA last March and saw its first significant commercial production in 2015. The second generation includes the original traits, plus improved cold storage and late blight resistance.

Because of the late blight resistance trait, the second generation of Innate must also undergo review by EPA, which is tasked with assessing pesticides, despite the fact that the protection is incorporated into the plant.

Cole said field trials were conducted last season in Idaho, Michigan and Pennsylvania, which were all hard hit by late blight, and the second-generation Innate spuds showed "very strong resistance." He said the potatoes resist all common U.S. strains of late blight.

"Growers should expect a significant reduction in sprays as a result of Innate generation two," Cole said.

Cole said Simplot has submitted petitions for approval of Innate in foreign markets including Canada, Japan, Mexico, Korea, Taiwan and China and hopes to have OKs from Mexico, Japan and Canada by the end of this year. The foreign approvals would represent a major step toward introducing Innate into the frozen and dehydrated potato markets, Cole said.

He said it's uncertain if Simplot will seek to segregate frozen or dehydrated Innate products and market them separately from conventional potatoes.

For now, however, he said Simplot is focused exclusively on the domestic whole-fresh and fresh-cut markets, marketing Innate spuds under the White Russet label.

"The industry is feeling more and more comfortable with (Innate) every passing day," Cole said.

Oakley, Idaho, farmer Randy Hardy, chairman of Sun Valley Potatoes and a past president of both

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the National Potato Council and U.S. Potato Board, said both grower organizations have followed Innate closely because of the sensitivity of export markets. Hardy emphasized gaining approval to export into a market doesn't necessarily mean a product will be accepted by foreign consumers.

"I've personally been opposed to the idea because of what I know about export markets, but Simplot has been very diligent in assuring us they're doing everything they can to prevent (market disruptions) from happening," Hardy said, adding he considers Innate to be an impressive product.

Hardy said Idaho dehydrated potato producers don't allow suppliers to raise Innate because of the potential for GMO spuds to be mistakenly intermingled.

Cole said Simplot intends to produce roughly 6,000 acres of first-generation Innate spuds in 2016. The potatoes reduce waste and enable the food service industry to save time by utilizing pre-cut, fresh potatoes that stay white without preservatives.

"We believe we've got a product consumers want that's been shown to have better quality, reduces waste, and in the case of generation two, reduces the amount of pesticides being applied," Cole said.

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