

WEDNESDAY

March 23, 2005

BUSINESS

The Forum
Your Business Editor
Craig McEwen
(701) 241-5502
businessnews@forumcomm.com

Biotech corn seed ended up in market Crop was consumed between 2001-2004

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO – Swiss biotechnology company Syngenta AG said Tuesday it mistakenly sold to farmers an experimental corn seed genetically engineered to resist bugs that was never approved by U.S. regulators.

Hundreds of tons of the resulting corn crop were shipped to consumers and overseas between 2001 and 2004, but three U.S. government agencies investigating said there was no health or environmental risk because of the seed's similarity to another Syngenta product approved for sale and consumption by federal regulators.

"While there are no safety concerns, the regulatory agencies are conducting investigations to determine the circumstances surrounding and extent of any violations of relevant laws and regulations," said Cynthia Bergman, an Environmental Protection Agency spokeswoman. "The U.S. government is also communicating with our major trading partners to ensure they understand there are no food safety or environmental concerns that could affect trade."

The Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration are also investigating.

In trading Tuesday, U.S.-traded Syngenta shares fell 39 cents, or 1.8 percent, to close at \$21.45 on the New York Stock Exchange.

Biotechnology critics say the incident confirms their fears that the industry can't ensure genetically engineered seeds won't mix with conventionally grown crops and contaminate the food supply.

Nearly half the nation's corn approved for market by the Department of Agriculture is genetically modified, but many consumers pay a premium for organic food or otherwise demand their groceries remain biotechnology free.