Veille citoyenne d'information sur les OGM et les semences

2024, another year contaminated by illegal GMOs

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In 2024, the European Union once again recorded alerts of GMO contamination. Of the 24 alerts, the vast majority concerned unauthorized GM rice, but also papaya, soybean, flax and corn. Two cases of contamination by genetically modified microorganisms were also reported, one of which even forced the Belgian authorities to issue a public statement recalling a product. In three cases, the nature of the illegal GMO was not specified.

If GMOs are detected illegally on their territory because they are not commercially authorised, Member States can alert the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF). The other Member States and the European Commission are then alerted. Such detections may occur once a product has already been placed on the market or at the border, often resulting in a refusal of entry into the European Union. Although not exhaustive, the RASFF online database[i] provides information on the

various cases of contamination by illegal GMOs as they are reported.

GM rice from China, again and again

GM rice from Asian countries is the most commonly found illegal GMO every year. In 2024, this is once again the case, with illegal GM rice accounting for more than half of the cases of contamination detected (see Table 1). China and Vietnam are the two countries most responsible for these GM rice contaminations, with China alone accounting for 8 out of 14 cases. Vietnam is responsible for 5 cases of GM rice contamination. The third and final country responsible for such contamination is Pakistan.

Since 2006, the European Union has been confronted with illegal occurrences of GM rice every year. Historically, this has involved LL rice from the United States or Bt rice from China. As the RASFF system does not provide details on the rice detected, it is not possible to know which GM rice was involved in 2024.

Four other GM plants found illegally

While three cases of illegal GMOs in Europe do not specify the nature of the GMO, one GM maize, one flax, two papayas and one soybean were also found in 2024, either on European territory or at its border. The countries of origin of these contaminations vary geographically, including Mexico, Russia, Ukraine, Romania and Thailand (see Table 2).

Like the cases of rice contamination, GM papaya from Thailand has been a long-standing contaminant in Europe, with the first cases reported in 2004 following an alert by Greenpeace. However, it is more rare for illegally imported GM papaya to come from Mexico, a country where, like Thailand, no GM papaya is authorised for cultivation[ii].

Organisms	Number of cases
Rice	14
Not detailled	3
Papaya	2
Micro-organism	2
Soybean	1
Flax	1
Maize	1
Total	**24**

Table 1 : GMOs contaminating Europe in 2024.

Two cases of contamination by GM microorganisms

GM plants are not the only organisms to have been found illegally in Europe. Two cases of illegal presence of genetically modified microorganisms (GMMs) have also been reported. These cases originated in China and the United Kingdom.

In the latter case, the RASFF system reports that the alert was considered "*serious*", even prompting a public statement[iii] from the Belgian authorities to inform consumers and withdraw the product concerned, capsules of lactase (an enzyme) intended for human consumption.

Compared to previous years, 2024 was therefore marked by almost twice as many alerts for the illegal presence of GMOs on European territory or at its borders. At a time when the European Commission and multinationals are pushing to end the traceability of many GMOs, this figure shows that the control of supply chains commonly claimed by these actors is not being achieved.

Year	Geographical origin	Organism	Number of cases	Total number of cases
2024	China	Rice	8	24
		GMM	1	
		Not detailled	2	
	Ukraine	Soybean	1	
	South Corea	Non detailled	1	
	Vietnam	Riz	5	
	Pakistan	Riz	1	
	United-Kingdom	GMM	1	
	Romania	Maize	1	
	Russia	Flax	1	
	Mexico	Papaya	1	
	Thailand	Papaya	1	
	Vietnam	Rice	8	
2023	China	Maize	1	13
	Thailand	Papaya	2	
	Netherlands	Rice	1	
	India	Rice	1	
	Cambodia	Papaye	3	
	Thailand	Papaya	2	
		Rice	1	
	Brazil	Papaya	1	
2022	United States of America	Soybean	1	13
	Vietnam	Rice	2	
	China	Rice	1	
	Singapore	Rice	1	
	Belgium / Bulgaria	GMM	1	
	Ukraine	Soybean	2	
	China	Rice	2	
		Not detailled	1	
2021	France / China	GMM	2	13
	Belgium / China	GMM	1	
	Belgium / India	Rice	1	
	Thailand	Papaya	1	
	France	Rice	1	

Netherlands	Rice	1
Unknown	GMM	1

Table 2 : annual summary of contamination cases since 1st January 2021.

i European Commission, « RASFF window ».

ii ISAAA Inc., « GM Approval Database – Advanced Search: 4 events with country approvals found – Papaya », July 2025.

iii Afsca, « Rappel de Holland & Barrett », 16 September 2024 (published in french and dutch only).

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