



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
of Feb. 19, 2007**

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Missouri Rice Certification Act Protects Farmers from GMOs

JEFFERSON CITY — During the past several years, Southeast Missouri rice farmers have seen repeated threats and hardships due to producers of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which are used to develop pharmaceutical drugs and are not approved for commercial consumption. I have fought back attempts to undermine local control over seed planting and open up the Bootheel to GMO producers, and now I am introducing legislation to enhance legal protections for rice farmers. Senate Bill 387 establishes the Missouri Rice Certification Act to help keep commercial rice from being contaminated by GMOs.

The Missouri Rice Certification Act regulates the production, transporting and handling of certain rice varieties. The legislation creates the Missouri Rice Certification Committee to work with the Missouri Department of Agriculture to enact rules affecting rice producers.

Under SB 387, was heard this week in the Senate Agriculture Committee, the certification committee is to be comprised of nine members, including the director of the Missouri Department of Agriculture and members representing rice handlers, rice end-users, rice producers, university researchers, rice mills and seed dealers. The certification committee will review existing rice-identity-preservation programs and develop rules to be enacted by the agriculture department regarding GMOs. The committee will also hold hearings for public input.

The state agriculture department will then be required to prevent commercial rice from contamination by GMOs; implement notification procedures for those who produce, transport and receive GMOs; enforce restrictions; investigate alleged violations and impose penalties; and encourage research and development of new types of rice.

The negative impact of GMOs on farmers was underscored last year with the widespread international backlash when U.S. rice crops were found to be contaminated by a strain produced by Bayer CropScience. As a result of the contamination, the United States lost the European Union Rice Market, which accounts for 6% of the volume or 198,000 tons worth \$67 million in 2005 of our rice exports. Before that, rice producers worked together to block legislation that would have shifted planting regulation from local communities and state control to federal authorities, which would allow GMO producers to move next door and threaten the livelihoods of Bootheel rice farms.

SB 387 guarantees needed protections for hardworking farmers, and I will work hard to see it passed into law.

Please feel free to contact my office at 877-291-5584 if I can be of assistance.

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*Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid,
Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.*