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New Biotech product could end up in feed

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DES MOINES, Iowa --

Ethanol industry leaders say a new biotech product that helps corn fight off pests could end up in exported animal feed and risk the industry's relationship with foreign markets.

At issue is the Agrisure RW corn rootworm trait developed by Syngenta Seeds Inc. The Renewable Fuels Association, a leading industry group, expressed its concerns over the product in a letter sent to Syngenta's seed executives that was obtained by The Associated Press.

The letter said the trait has not been approved for export markets but is being sold to growers in Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska and Wisconsin. The association said the trait could end up in exported distillers grains, a byproduct of ethanol production that is fed to livestock.

"There is a risk that the shipment would be rejected by the importing customer - permanently damaging the U.S. ethanol industry's relationships with these important markets," association President and CEO Bob Dinneen said in the letter sent Friday.

He asked Syngenta executives to "ensure this product stays out of unapproved market channels" by educating customers of marketing issues and removing dry mill ethanol facilities - where distillers grains are produced - from its lists of points of sale for grain containing the trait.

Jeff Gox, Syngenta's global head of corn and soybeans, said without products like Agrisure RW, farmers won't be able to keep up with the ethanol industry's demand.

"New technologies that improve crop yield and quality will be the critical enablers in growers' efforts to meet the escalating demand brought on by the skyrocketing ethanol industry and still meet the needs of the livestock and export industry. ..." Cox said in a response letter sent Tuesday.

Syngenta spokeswoman Anne Burt said the Golden Valley, Minn.-based company is stringently monitoring Agrisure RW, by tracking its sales and making sure growers only deliver the byproduct to domestic users, among other precautions.

Last year, 12 million metric tons of distillers grains were produced in the United States, with exports making up more than 10 percent of sales. Most of the product originated in Nebraska, Illinois and Iowa, the nation's top ethanol producers.

Last month, the Iowa Corn Growers Association noted that Agrisure RW lacks approval in major export markets including Japan and Mexico.

"We owe it to our growers to provide information when this could limit their ability to market their corn after harvest this fall," Bob Bowman, a corn grower from DeWitt and member of the National Corn Growers trade policy working group, said in a news release.

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