

## **FDA STATEMENT ON RUMOURED “PLASTIC” RICE ON THE GHANAIAN MARKET**

Several videos on social media claim the existence of plastic rice, suggesting that these may be on the market and therefore a public concern.

The Food and Drugs Authority became aware of these videos late last year and immediately commenced investigations to ascertain the truth or otherwise of the rumours.

Using our nationwide market surveillance programme, we obtained random samples. FDA issued a Press Statement requesting members of the public to assist by either submitting samples of the rumored plastic rice or giving information of where it could be found.

We subjected all the samples received to laboratory investigation. Results from the laboratory analysis indicated that all the samples were in fact authentic rice, and not plastic.

Consistent with our practice, we contacted our international partner, the International Food Safety Authority Network (INFOSAN) who were conducting investigations into the same issues.

The INFOSAN's work revealed that:

“Rumoured artificial, plastic, fake rice appearing in Singapore, Nigeria and Canada turned out to be real, authentic rice”.

Furthermore, the more endowed member countries of INFOSAN such as Germany, USA, Canada etc, have sophisticated research outfits that are monitoring International trade in Food and sharing the information with its members.

The rumor of plastic rice is not peculiar to Ghana. This is a sign of the times, and the effect of the increased access to information technology. There have been reports in the international media concerning “*plastic*” rice in Nigeria. This rumour has since been denied by the NAFDAC (National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, Nigeria) following its investigations. Similar reports have been recorded in the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Singapore and the United States of America (USA). The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) ranks this artificial “*plastic*” rice as the ninth of thirteen (13) emerging risks, in its *2016 report on emerging risks*. This notwithstanding, these rumors have not been confirmed, and in all jurisdictions, the regulatory authorities are monitoring rice imports from countries that are purported to produce this “*plastic*” rice.

The physical and chemical properties of plastics are such that they ordinarily cannot be reconstituted into edible food. This is because plastics cannot absorb water and do not mix with water.

The textural properties of rice varieties are due to the nature of their starch content, that is the ratio of amylose to amylopectin, the constituents of starch. Amylopectin is responsible for the sticky nature of rice and its quantity is affected by the varietal differences. This character of the starch in rice enables cooked rice grains to agglomerate and allow it to be kneaded into a malleable sphere that can bounce off hard surfaces as depicted in some of the videos on social media. Amylose is responsible for the gelatinous nature of rice and therefore contributes to the bouncy property of the rice when made into balls. The varieties of rice that contain a higher quantity of Amylose will produce greater bounce whilst those with higher amylopectin will bounce less.

We are therefore calling on the general public, particularly the media to partner with the FDA to raise public awareness on all matters of food safety issues.

The FDA's mission is to ensure that all products, including food are safe. We do this by risk assessment and management, laboratory investigation, collaborating with other National Regulatory Authorities, Post Market Surveillance and Public Education.

The Authority appreciates the role of the general public and the media in sharing information on the rumoured "*plastic*" rice on the Ghanaian market and engaging us in a timely manner. I wish to commend all media houses that conferred with the Authority on the issue *before going public with it. I encourage other media houses to emulate this action to avoid creating anxiety among consumers on all issues that border on food safety and adulteration.*

Thank you

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