

Talking Points on Genetically Modified Foods National Farmers Union (Region 3)

Background:

Genetically modified soybeans, corn and canola are grown commercially in Canada.

Monsanto has asked the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to register GM wheat. Eighty-two percent of Canada's wheat customers say they will quit buying Canadian wheat if GM wheat is grown in Canada.

The National Farmers Union was the first farm organization to develop a comprehensive policy on genetically modified food.

Issues:

Increased Disease/Weed /Contamination Problems:

There is growing evidence that glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, contributes to the spread of fusarium in grain crops.

A University of Manitoba study found that 95% of non-GM certified canola seed lots are contaminated by GM material.

In March 2004, Monsanto was asked to increase its buffer zones for open-air field tests of GM wheat to 300 m from 30 m after studies found GM wheat pollen travelling beyond 30 m. For the past three years Monsanto has tested GM wheat in open-air fields with 30 m buffer zones.

Superweeds, resistant to glyphosate are becoming more common, leading to increased herbicide use.

A study released in November 2003 by Charles Benbrook showed that while GM crops reduced pesticide use in the US by 25 million pounds between 1996 and 1998, they increased pesticide use by 73 million pounds between 2001 and 2003.

Once a GM crop is released it cannot be unreleased. The widespread genetic contamination of canola in western Canada means that Canada will never be able to grow non-GM canola from Canadian canola seed and canola export markets are lost forever. We do not have systems in place to prevent genetic contamination through pollen flow, spills or human error.

The use of GM technology is not allowed on certified organic farms. Organic crops contaminated by neighbouring GM crops cannot be sold as organic, leading to a loss of a premium price for the crop. Wind pollinated GM crops like canola, corn and wheat are a major concern for organic farmers.

Increased Corporate Control:

Between 1974 and 2000 gross farm income tripled but net farm income fell. Input suppliers, including suppliers of GM technology have captured 100% of the increase in gross income. GMOs burden farmers with higher seed costs, increased chemical costs and a loss of markets.

Farmers growing GM crops are required to sign Technology Use Agreements (TUAs) through which they agree to not save any of their crop for seed and to allow company inspectors on their farm for several years. TUAs cost farmers money and give corporations additional control over family farms.

The Percy Schmeiser case highlights two issues - (1) farmers' rights to retain and use farmer-saved seed and (2) the ability of a corporation to punish any farmer who has had their seed supply contaminated.

A University of Saskatchewan study indicates GM wheat could cost Canadian farmers \$185 million in sales. According to the Polaris Institute, Monsanto stands to earn \$7 million from RR wheat. The profits go to corporations. The risks and costs are borne by consumers and farmers.

The Biotech Industry maintains that foreign markets should be forced to be more accepting of GM wheat. If consumers in places like Europe and Japan refuse to buy GM foods, forcing trade agreements down their throats will not open up markets.

National Farmers Union demands:

Clear, consistent, mandatory labeling of GM ingredients in food.

Producers of GM seed be held liable for the genetic contamination of non-GM crops and seed supplies.

No further introduction of GM crops in Ontario or Canada, until adequate measures are in place to prevent genetic contamination.

No registration of GM wheat unless the concerns of Canadian farmers, industry and consumers are addressed.

That farmers stop using Monsanto products. "If you don't want GM wheat, don't buy Roundup."

No more secret, open-air field tests of GM crops in Ontario or Canada.

Take Action:

Discuss GMOs at Local meetings and with neighbours, friends and family.

Host public meetings on GMOs.

Write letters to the editor to local and regional papers.

Hand out "Ten Reasons Why We Don't Want GM Wheat" or other information on GMOs at fairs and community events.

Write, phone, fax or email MPs, MPPs and the Ministers of Agriculture.

For MP contact information, go to: http://canada.gc.ca/directories/direct_e.html

Additional Contacts:

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Additional Sources of Information:

See the NFU website at <www.nfu.ca>. Check the "NFU Top 10" button for "Ten Reasons We Don't Want GM Wheat" and the NFU Policy on GM Foods. Under the News, Briefs and Policy buttons additional NFU information on GMO's is available.

E. Ann Clark's Recent Papers at <www.plant.uoguelph.ca/research/homepages/eaclark/>.

Polaris Institute at <www.polarisinstitute.org>. Look under the Bio-justice pages. <http://www.greenpeace.ca> <http://www.efao.ca>

Glossary:

Genetically-modified (GM) or Genetically-engineered (GE): Canada's Royal Society defined 'genetic modification' as the direct transfer or modification of genetic material using recombinant DNA techniques. 'Genetic modification' is the human insertion or manipulation of genes or genetic material, distinct from traditional plant-breeding techniques.

Roundup Ready (RR) wheat (or canola or soybeans): GM wheat wherein Monsanto has inserted a gene that allows the plant to tolerate applications of Roundup (Monsanto's trade name for the broad-spectrum herbicide glyphosate).

Bt Corn: GM corn which has a gene from the bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis*, making the corn plant itself toxic to some insects.

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