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**FORMER UK ENVIRONMENT MINISTER RAISES  
SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT GM CROPS**

**SASKATOON, Sask.**—“With the exception of climate change, genetically-modified crops are the most serious political and environmental question under debate at the current time,” said former UK Environment Minister Michael Meacher. He was speaking today at a news conference in Saskatoon.

After 29 years on the UK government front benches, Meacher was dropped from Cabinet by Prime Minister Tony Blair. Many believe that Blair’s move was motivated by Meacher’s cautious approach toward the introduction of GM crops into the UK. A UK decision on GM crops may come early next year.

Meacher outlined four major issues surrounding GM crops. First, there are human health concerns. “There has been almost no human health testing done on GM foods. We should not assume that the safety of GM foods can be taken for granted. I’m not saying that eating GM foods is going to cause illness, rather that we simply do not know because we haven’t done the science,” said Meacher. He noted that there has been only one study on human health effects published in the UK, and only a handful of others published around the world. Meacher called “substantial equivalence”—the loophole through which governments and companies escape the need for human health testing—a “profound fraud” and a “public scandal.”

Second, Meacher pointed out that there are many unanswered questions and few good studies regarding the effects of GM crops and related agronomic practices on the environment. Specifically, he cited questions about effects on soil organisms and bird species.

Third, Meacher raised the issue of coexistence—is it possible to have GM crops without adversely affecting farmers who want to grow non-GM or organic crops?

Meacher stated: “The evidence of widespread contamination that I have seen in Saskatchewan leaves me no doubt that it is absolutely impossible to achieve coexistence.” Meacher cited a UK government report which stated that if GM crops are introduced, “it will be difficult if not impossible to retain certain current agricultural practices”—meaning organic and non-GM production.

Fourth, Meacher noted the issue of labeling and the right of consumers to retain the option to eat GM-free food. “When I was Environment Minister in the UK, people wrote to me in the hundreds, if not thousands, and said to me: We don’t want you to commercialize GM crops, but if you do, you have got to guarantee for me that I can eat GM-free food.” Meacher said that the UK and European Union labeling standards currently under discussion were inadequate to ensure that citizens could choose non-GM foods, and that Canadian efforts were far behind those in the UK and EU.

He concluded: “GM food has been introduced far too quickly. It is a risk. Maybe in the end it will turn out to no problem. But we don’t know. That is the point. We haven’t taken the time to do the studies and answer the questions. If it had been introduced over 20 to 50 years, we’d have time to find out. But if you launch it into the nation’s food supply, and then find out ten years down the track that something negative is occurring and affecting a lot of people, it’s a bit late.”

While in Saskatchewan, Meacher met with representatives of the Canadian Wheat Board, visited farms, met with reporters, and strategized with farm organizations and citizens’ groups. He will be in Toronto and Guelph on July 31, before returning to the UK.

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For More Information:

Micheal Meacher, UK MP:	c/o mobile (416) 450-2439
Stewart Wells, NFU President:	(306) 773-6852 or 741-7694
Arnold Taylor, SOD President:	(306) 252-2783
Darrin Qualman, Exec. Sec.:	(306) 652-9465