



National Family Farm Coalition

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national farmers union

In Union Is Strength

FARM GROUPS FROM U.S. AND CANADA UNITE ON GM WHEAT BAN
Action coincides with International Day of Farmers' Struggle

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

APRIL 17, 2002

SASKATOON, SASK.. and WASHINGTON, D. C.—Today, as farmers around the world protest genetically-modified (GM) seeds that endanger their livelihoods and threaten natural biodiversity in key food crops, representatives of the National Farmers Union of Canada (NFU) and the National Family Farm Coalition of the United States (NFFC) announced a collaborative effort to stop the introduction of GM wheat in North America.

The two groups, both members of the global farmers' movement Via Campesina, made the announcement as part of a worldwide series of actions focused on GM crops and food coordinated by Via Campesina as part of the April 17th International Day of Farmers' Struggle (see backgrounder on the Via Campesina and April 17th.)

“Banning GM wheat is crucial to the survival of the North American farmers who grow wheat,” said Terry Boehm, a wheat producer from Allan, Sask. and an NFU Board member. He continued: “We export most of our wheat and our foreign buyers have made it perfectly clear that they want nothing to do with genetically modified food.”

Nearly 70% of Canadian wheat and over 50% of U.S. wheat is exported. According to Canadian Wheat Board estimates, two-thirds of international buyers do not want to buy GM wheat. A survey of the U.S. customer base for hard red spring wheat indicates that 65% are opposed to Roundup Ready (RR) wheat technology. This consumer opposition is connected to the industry's failure to engage in long-term testing of potential health hazards of GM plants prior to their introduction into the global food supply.

Monsanto, a multi-national agribusiness conglomerate based in the United States, holds patents on technology that uses genetic-modification to make plants tolerant to the pesticide glyphosate, which is marketed under the trade name "Roundup." Monsanto has announced that it will be seeking approval from the U.S. and Canadian governments for commercial introduction of "Roundup Ready" wheat in 2005.

"We have been working to prevent the spread of genetically-modified crops on both sides of the border," said NFU Women's President Shannon Storey, "but Monsanto has been playing us against each other, claiming that we have to grow it or lose our market advantage to farmers who will. That strategy ends today."

"Monsanto's promises simply do not match reality," says NFFC President and Missouri farmer Bill Christison. He continued: "We have watched foreign markets evaporate and prices fall for farmers using GM corn and soybean products and we have learned our lessons well." U.S. corn producers have lost \$200 million in annual sales to markets in the European Union alone, which established a moratorium on GM products in 1998.

"The future of genetically-modified crops in North America will be determined on the western plains of the United States and Canada," says NFFC Trade Taskforce Chair and Montana farmer Dena Hoff. She continued: "Individually our groups have begun the farmer education and organizing necessary to win. Today we begin to work together more deliberately to share strategies that will make that victory possible. This is a fight we simply cannot afford to lose."

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Backgrounder to the April 17th NFU-Canada and NFFC-U.S. news release

April 17th : International Day of Farmers' Struggle

The Vía Campesina declared April 17th as the International Day of Farmers' Struggle in commemoration of the killing of 19 peasants in Northern state of Para, Brazil, that occurred on April 17th, 1996. Since then, farmers and peasants around the world join together on April 17th to focus the world's attention on the situation of rural people. In 2001, farmers in over 35 countries organized teach-ins, public meetings, demonstrations, meetings with government officials and press conferences to protest the negative impact that regional and global trade agreements were having on farming families everywhere.

This year, farmers in the North and South are joining together to protest the use of genetically-modified seeds and the continued repression of farm leaders. Events will take place in numerous countries in Asia, Europe and throughout the Americas.

What is the Vía Campesina?

The Vía Campesina is a global farm movement that brings together organizations of peasants, small and medium-sized farmers, rural women, farm workers and indigenous agrarian communities in Asia, the Americas and Europe. Africa is working to establish a pan-African network that will then join the Vía Campesina. Since the Vía Campesina was formed in 1993 it has experienced rapid growth making it perhaps the largest rural social movement to have emerged in recent times. Currently, 82 farm organizations representing millions of farming families from 47 countries belong to the Vía Campesina.

Why was the Vía Campesina formed?

When the Uruguay Round of the GATT drew to a close farm organizations had already had years of experience with structural adjustment programs and regional trade agreements. Liberalization in agriculture had wreaked havoc on rural communities and the environment. Farming families and whole rural communities were "disappeared" as they could no longer make a living by growing food. Many farm leaders believed that the WTO and the Agreement on Agriculture would only make the situation worse.

As agricultural policy was defined more and more at the international level farm leaders began to forge links and alliances with like-minded organizations around the world. The Vía Campesina emerged in direct opposition to the globalization of an industrialized and liberalized model of agriculture promoted by the WTO and regional free trade agreements. By forming the Vía Campesina progressive farm leaders gathered together to build an alternative model of agriculture. Here, agriculture is farmer-driven, is based on peasant and small-holder production, and plays an important social function while at the same time being economically viable, socially just and ecologically sustainable.

What does the *Vía Campesina* do?

The main goal of the *Vía Campesina* is to build an alternative model of agriculture. To reach this goal *Vía Campesina* organizations from around the world work together to develop and implement farmer-based policies for sustainable food production, fair trade and food sovereignty. For the *Vía Campesina* working together means:

- Building solidarity and unity among farm organizations
- Strengthening the participation of women at all levels of farm organizations
- Organizing exchanges and developing linkages among farm organizations
- Engaging in collective action

The core issues that the *Vía Campesina* is now working on are:

- Food Sovereignty and Agricultural Trade
- Genetic Resources, Biodiversity and Farmers' Rights
- Agrarian Reform
- Human Rights and Solidarity
- Gender and rural development
- Farmworkers' rights
- Migration
- Alternative agriculture

Vía Campesina structure and representation

An International Coordinating Commission (ICC) of 14, with two representatives (one man and one woman) of peasant and farm organizations from each of the seven *Vía Campesina* regions is the most important link among the various peasant organizations. The seven regions and the Regional Coordinators of the *Vía Campesina* are:

- **South Asia:** Karnataka State Farmers Association (KRRS), India.
- **Southeast and Northeast Asia:** Federation of Peasant Organizations of Indonesia (FSPI), Indonesia
- **Western and Eastern Europe:** Coordination Paysanne Européenne (CPE), Europe
- **North America:**
 - National Farmers Union (NFU), Canada
 - Union Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autonomas (UNORCA), Mexico
- **Central America:**
 - Asociación de Organizaciones Campesinas Centroamericanas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo (ASOCODE)
 - Belize Association of Producer Organization (BAPO)
- **Caribbean:**
 - Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños (ANAP), Cuba
 - Winward Islands Farmers Association (WINFA)
- **South America:**
 - Movimento de Trabalhadores sem Terra (MST), Brazil
 - Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas (ANAMURI), Chile