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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

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WIDESPREAD OPPOSITION TO ROUNDUP READY WHEAT FORCES MONSANTO TO BACK OFF

SASKATOON, SK – Widespread opposition from farm organizations, environmental groups and consumers has forced Monsanto to terminate its research and promotion of genetically-modified (GM) wheat. In a news release dated May 10, 2004, Monsanto announced it “will discontinue breeding and field level research of Roundup Ready wheat.”

“This is a tremendous victory for farmers in Canada and around the world,” stated Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union (NFU). “Clearly, Monsanto is backing off because the opposition to genetically-modified wheat is overwhelming.”

“We look forward to Monsanto’s official withdrawal of GM wheat from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency’s approval processes,” added Wells. “We also look forward to assurances that no GM wheat will be planted anywhere in Canada outside of greenhouses and that the threat of contamination and subsequent market loss will be eliminated.”

NFU Vice-President Terry Boehm pointed out that not only will this victory ensure Canada preserves its traditional share of the global wheat market, it will also save farmers millions of dollars in direct agronomic costs. “The savings in both these areas amounts to approximately \$823 million annually,” stated Boehm. “That is good news for financially-strapped family farmers.”

In addition to the direct savings, there are other indirect benefits. Wheat production will remain a viable option for many organic farmers, who would otherwise face the possibility of their crops being contaminated by GM seeds. Consumers in both the domestic and international markets have also indicated clearly that they reject genetically-modified wheat.

Boehm warned, however, that farmers and consumers must remain vigilant on this issue. “It is worrisome that, in its press release, Monsanto leaves the door open for the introduction of wheat with other biotechnological traits besides herbicide tolerance,” he said.

The NFU was instrumental in bringing to light research by Agriculture Canada scientists which proved a link exists between the use of glyphosate formulations (like Monsanto’s Roundup) and increased fusarium disease in wheat. Losses from fusarium already total hundreds of millions of dollars per year, and the introduction of GM wheat may well have

spread and intensified the incidence of fusarium as a result of increased glyphosate use. Monsanto had been unwilling to provide Canadian regulators with full disclosure of research on the correlation between fusarium and glyphosate use.

The opposition to GM wheat included the NFU, Saskatchewan Organic Directorate, Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, the Canadian Wheat Board, Canadian Health Coalition, Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, Keystone Agricultural Producers, Greenpeace, the Polaris Institute and others too numerous to list. A letter signed by 220 Canadian organizations expressing opposition to GM wheat was sent to then-Prime Minister Jean Chretien on July 31, 2001. It called on the Prime Minister to “act immediately to prevent the introduction of GM wheat in Canadian food and fields.”

“The vast majority of farmers and a significant portion of civil society had aligned against Monsanto and GM wheat,” concluded Wells. “In some ways, it was Monsanto against ‘everybody’ – and ‘everybody’ won.”

The victory echoes a similar victory in the 1990s, when Monsanto tried to introduce a genetically-modified dairy cow hormone that Canadians didn’t want or need. Rural and urban citizens united to oppose Monsanto and won on that issue as well. Today, a broad coalition has recorded a similar success in turning back Monsanto’s unwanted GM wheat.

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