

Ten Reasons Why We Don't Want GM Wheat

Wheat is one of humanity's most important and culturally-significant sources of food. Monsanto plans to introduce genetically-modified (GM) wheat. Monsanto has inserted a gene so that the wheat crop can be sprayed with Monsanto's weed spray Roundup: killing other plants but not the wheat. There are many reasons that Canadians—consumers and farmers alike—don't want GM wheat, here are ten.

- 1. Market loss** The international customers that buy 82% of Canada's wheat crop say that they will stop buying if Canada introduces GM wheat. They are clear: they will stop buying *all* wheat from us: GM and non-GM alike. One customer, Warburtons (a large British bakery), received 6,000 customer inquiries in 2001 regarding food safety and GM wheat. **GM wheat kills markets.**
- 2. The end of organic agriculture** GM wheat threatens to destroy organic agriculture in much of Canada. GM canola has made it nearly impossible for organic farmers to grow that crop: seed supply contamination and pollen drift mean that organic farmers cannot be sure that their canola will be free of GM seeds. The introduction of GM wheat and subsequent GM crops will leave organic farmers fewer and fewer crops to grow. Organic crop production will become nearly impossible and Canadians will lose access to locally-grown, organic food. **GM wheat yes = organic no!**
- 3. Lower prices for farmers** GM wheat will dramatically decrease demand for Canadian wheat. Lower prices to farmers are easy to predict. On the other hand, producing GM-free Canadian wheat will give our farmers a marketing advantage if the U.S. and other nations introduce GM wheat. High-quality, GM-free Canadian wheat could be our competitive advantage, our premium product. **Stopping GM wheat means higher prices for farmers.**
- 4. Health concerns** Many Canadians, like citizens around the world, question the safety of GM foods. Further, Canadians have grave doubts about Canada's food safety regulatory system—a system based, not on independent testing in government labs, but on reviewing data from Monsanto and similar companies. Finally, farmers and consumers cannot trust the government to regulate because it is too busy promoting the GM food industry. **Why take a risk on GM foods?**
- 5. Environmental damage** GM wheat, once released, cannot be hauled back in. Once this life form is in the environment, it is there forever. Not only can we not recall GM wheat, we cannot contain or control it. GM canola is now cross-pollinating with non-GM canola and with related wild species. Monsanto's wheat genes will similarly "flow" through the environment. Again, Canadians know that there has not been sufficient, independent testing done on the long-term ecosystem effects of genetically-modifying the planet's food crops. **This is a completely unnecessary threat to the environment.**
- 6. Agronomic costs** Some farmers now grow GM Roundup Ready canola. Spray that canola with Roundup, and the weeds die and the canola is unscathed. But introduce GM Roundup Ready wheat and the equation changes. Farmers will need additional chemicals to control volunteer Roundup Ready wheat in their RR canola and to control volunteer RR canola in their RR wheat. One agronomist estimated the additional weed control costs at up to **\$400 million annually.**
- 7. Segregation won't work** Monsanto says that segregation systems are the solution to market rejection: keep GM and non-GM wheat separate from field to customer. But segregation systems will fail because GM varieties will soon contaminate our wheat seed supply. Tests on canola show that most 'non-GM' certified seed contains GM varieties. The same will happen to wheat. With contaminated seed, it's impossible to run a segregation system. Further, our bulk, high-throughput grain handling system is ill-designed to segregate: with thousands of points where grain could be mis-represented, mixed, or mis-labelled. Just one or two mistakes, just one or two customers demanding non-GM wheat and getting GM, could cost Canada its reputation for grain quality and cost farmers hundreds-of-millions of dollars annually. And even without mistakes, many customers say that if Canada introduces GM varieties, they will stop buying Canadian wheat altogether, regardless of whether we try to segregate. Ironically, the way that segregation will work in practice

is that international wheat *customers* will segregate the world's wheat exporters into those who plant GM varieties and those who don't and buy from those who don't. Finally, successful or not, segregation systems will cost farmers millions. **Segregation is costly and will fail.**

- 8. Labelling** Most Canadians want GM food ingredients labelled. But governments, processors and retailers, and corporations such as Monsanto oppose labelling. They oppose your right to know if you are eating GM food. These companies claim that the fate of GM foods should be left to “the market”, and then simultaneously deny us the information with which we could make an informed decision at the grocery store. It is totally illegitimate, until we have mandatory labelling and an informed public, to introduce new GM foods. **What are they afraid of?**
- 9. Corporate control** Transnationals such as Monsanto, Cargill, and ConAgra are increasing their control over our food supply. Worse, Monsanto and others are taking control, not only of our seeds, but of the genes—the building blocks of life. And they use patents and courts to enforce that control. The tremendous market power that agri-biz transnationals already have, and their attendant ability to suck the profits out of farmers' pockets, is the real cause of the farm income crisis. GM wheat offers no net benefits to farmers or consumers but it dramatically increases corporate control of the global food system. **Should Monsanto control our seeds and our food?**
- 10. We don't need it** Farmers are told, rightly or wrongly, that there is too much grain in the world: we don't need GM wheat in order to grow more. Consumers will see no benefit from GM wheat: with or without it, bread prices will still go up. GM wheat brings no benefits. GM wheat is not a solution: it creates problems rather than solving them. **Let's say no to this turkey.**

One reason why you would want GM wheat

- 1. If you're a Monsanto shareholder** Independent economists report that the financial benefits from GM wheat will go to Monsanto: farmers' costs will rise and consumers will not see lower bread prices. Monsanto lost \$2.5 billion [Cdn.\$] in 2002, mostly because of lower Roundup sales. Monsanto needs to return to profitability. Thus, it is pushing its GM Roundup Ready wheat. With GM wheat, the profits go to Monsanto and the risks and costs go to consumers and farmers.

Glossary

Genetically-modified (GM): 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: 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).

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In Union Is Strength

Over the past decade, the NFU worked alongside rural and urban allies across Canada and stopped Monsanto from introducing its genetically-modified dairy cow hormone designed to increase milk production, rBGH. Together, we won on milk, and we can win on wheat.

*Farmers, please join with us to protect Canadian family farms and to create better food and agricultural policies for Canada.
To join, please send a cheque for \$150 to the address above.*

Non-farmers, please support our ongoing work to ensure that all Canadians have access to safe, nutritious food. Please become an Associate Member by sending a cheque for \$50 to the address above.