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**national farmers union**  
*In Union Is Strength*

**Renfrew County Local**

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**NEWS RELEASE**

**August 22, 2008**

**Monsanto sale of rBST division the result of public opposition**

Dave Mackay, president of the Renfrew County National Farmers Union says public pressure has forced Monsanto to get out of the business of producing a controversial bovine growth hormone known as Recombinant Bovine Somatotropin (rBST). This genetically engineered drug, which also goes by the acronym rBGH (Recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone) and the trade name Posilac, is manufactured from genetically-modified bacteria and is injected into dairy cows once or twice a month to dramatically increase their milk production. Elanco, a subsidiary of global pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly and Company, has since purchased the controversial artificial rBST dairy hormone for \$300 million.

The National Farmers Union opposed the introduction of rBST into Canada by Monsanto in the late 1980's because there had been absolutely no long-term health studies done on the effects of the hormone's use. Allowing the product into the market place would amount to a colossal experiment on both humans and animals.

The National Farmers Union was the only farm organization to participate in a campaign advocating a moratorium on the drug's introduction until concrete proof was produced showing no long-term negative effects on human and animal health.

In 1994 Monsanto pressured Health Canada to approve the drug for use on Canadian dairy farms. Had it been approved, rBST would have been the first genetically engineered product to enter the food system in Canada. Dairy farmers realized the potential effect of this hormone on the transportation pooling of milk, the supply management system, and the sale of breeding stock with accurate production records.

At that time, Australia and the European Community had banned the drug and declared a moratorium on its use to further study its effects.

In the late 1990s, a group of NFU farmers travelled to the U.S. to determine the health effects of rBST on animal health. They interviewed farmers who used rBST on their herds. The farmers there reported that the extra stress caused by the drug made the cows

more susceptible to certain digestive and productive problems and could even reduce life expectancy. In addition, the increased production caused a higher rate of illnesses, such as mastitis and udder infections, which had to be treated with antibiotics. On the other hand, Canadian dairy farmers are able to produce an abundance of natural milk without the use of rBST. This was an important market consideration as consumers in Canada preferred a pure and natural product.

At the same time farmers, a joint lobby by a total of 60 organizations, including the Dairy Farmers of Canada, consumer groups, the Council of Canadians, women's groups and health professionals raised public awareness about the dangers of rBST and the need for Canada to implement food health and safety measures to protect food security. Over 50,000 names on petitions, cards and letters landed on the desk of the Minister of Agriculture during that campaign.

Three highly-respected scientists at Health Canada who raised legitimate health and safety concerns about the drug were unfairly fired. Finally, in 1998, the Canadian government banned the use of rBST.

Some of the health concerns with rBST include the toxic effects on cows and increased levels of IGF-1, a known cancer-causing agent. Presently in Canada it appears the only way that rBST can enter the food chain is through imports of processed food, such as ice cream and infant formula, which contain rBST modified-milk ingredients, according to the August 11, 2008 edition of 24 Hours, an Ottawa-area newspaper. Milk and cheese made with rBST has been banned in Canada and Europe for the past decade. Recently, Safeway, Starbucks and Kraft announced they are removing milk produced using rBST from their products in the U.S.

Monsanto's sale of its controversial artificial rBST dairy hormone to Eli Lilly for \$300 million came after consumers in the U.S. pushed, on a state-by-state level, for labelling laws to indicate rBST free milk.

Mackay concluded that members of the National Farmers Union greatly appreciate all the work that was done to have rBST banned in Canada in 1998. Now that the rBST drug is in the hands of a new owner, Eli Lilly, the NFU members will continue to be vigilant. Ensuring a safe, healthy milk supply is critically important to Canadian consumers and Canadian family farms.

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