

National Office  
2717 Wentz Ave.  
Saskatoon, Sask.  
S7K 4B6  
Tel (306) 652-9465  
Fax (306) 664-6226  
E-Mail: nfu@nfu.ca



**national farmers union**

***In Union Is Strength***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **NFU VICE-PRESIDENT COMPLETES SPEAKING TOUR OF AUSTRALIA**

Terry Boehm, Vice-President of the National Farmers Union (NFU), recently completed a speaking tour of Australia. Boehm was invited to Australia to outline the experience of western Canadian farmers with genetically-modified (GM) canola.

A number of states in Australia currently have moratoriums on planting of GM canola, but they are under intense pressure from biotechnology companies to allow the commercial introduction of GM crops. Conventional or non-GM canola generally commands higher prices in global markets for Australian farmers.

Boehm said Australian farmers should think twice about handing control over their canola varieties to multinational corporations. He pointed out that Agriculture Canada statistics clearly show that the introduction of GM canola in the 1990s failed to significantly increase canola yields. He added that while the “hybridization” process does increase yields, the process can be applied to both GM and non-GM varieties equally.

During his tour, Boehm was subject to criticism from the Canola Council of Canada, which is an industry-dominated lobby group that promotes GM canola. Boehm said the Canola Council has a vested interest in promoting GM canola. He cited the Canola Council’s website, which lists among its directors, executives from Dow Agro Sciences, Bayer, Monsanto, Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, and others.

“Farmers’ choices for non-GM canola varieties have virtually disappeared in Canada,” he stated. “Almost all the canola seed varieties available to farmers now are GM varieties.” The biotechnology companies which hold intellectual property rights on GM canola seed varieties are profiting from their control over what farmers plant. “Gene patents are extremely profitable to the companies when they are linked to contracts disallowing seed saving and re-use,” stated Boehm. “Over time, these companies have boosted the price of seed to the point where a farmer is on average paying \$6.00 per pound. This translates into a minimum of \$30.00 per acre for seed alone. In addition, a farmer pays a \$15.00 per acre technology use fee (TUA) for the privilege of planting glyphosate-tolerant canola. In other specific herbicide-tolerant canolas, these fees are incorporated into the price of the chemical. The ‘package’ costs the farmer approximately the same, regardless of the option he chooses.”

Boehm said Monsanto and other biotech companies prosecute farmers “to the fullest extent of the law” in cases where his or her field is found to be contaminated by canola seed containing a gene covered by intellectual property rights owned by the company. “The biotech companies have the right to the gene, the cell, and the plant, no matter how it arrives on a farmer’s field,” he said.

Boehm said the biotech firms have used all means possible to make the seed legally sterile. “This includes patents, plant variety protection acts, and contract law. GM canola is just the beginning. The model used for canola through these so-called intellectual property rights is one that companies would like to use for all other seeds and crops if possible. The object is to make the farmers dependent on the companies for their seeds at their price.”

Boehm was one of two Saskatchewan farmers who participated in the speaking tour. Arnold Taylor, President of the Canadian Organic Growers (COG), was also a featured speaker.

- 30 -

Contact: Terry Boehm, NFU Vice-President (306) 652-9465  
Terry Pugh, NFU Executive-Secretary (306) 652-9465