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GM Flax Contamination from Canada Soars to 28 Countries: But Canadian farmers still have no answers

For Immediate Release

Ottawa, Monday, October 5, 2009 – 28 countries, including more European countries as well as Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Thailand, have now been affected by contamination from genetically modified (GM) flax in Canadian exports since contamination was first reported on September 8.

Mere weeks are left before farmers in Canada finish harvesting their flax and yet farmers still don't know the source or full extent of the GM contamination -- and it could be weeks before authorities in Canada confirm any details. Flax prices remain depressed.

GM flax is not approved for human consumption in the following 28 countries where contamination has now reached: Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Sweden, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Croatia, Czech Republic, Spain, Denmark, Estonia, Norway, Finland, France, Greece, Romania, Portugal, Iceland, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Mauritius. Companies are removing products from the market as the GM flax has been found in cereals, bakery products, bakery mixtures and nut/seed products. 9 GM flax contamination notices have been filed so far through the European Commission's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed.

European authorities have named the source of contamination as the GM flax "Triffid", which was developed in Canada but was de-registered in 2001 and has been illegal to sell since that time. While there is a test for the Triffid flax available from the company Genetic ID, the Flax Council of Canada is delaying confirmation as it waits for the Plant Biotechnology Institute in Saskatoon to develop a new test for Triffid.

“Its been nearly a month since contamination was first found, but neither the Canadian government nor industry has come forward with any answers,” said Stewart Wells, President of the National Farmers Union of Canada. “The continued uncertainty and unanswered questions show the need for more strict regulation of GM crops in Canada.”

“Farmers face the threat of unwanted contamination from GM crops, even when the crops are not supposed to be grown,” said Arnold Taylor an organic flax grower and Chair of the Organic Agriculture Protection Fund of the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate.

“Someone’s going to have to pay for testing our crops for contamination and any required clean-up. Who will be liable?”

“The Canadian government still refuses to consider market harm when they decide to approve GM crops. This obviously has to change immediately,” said Lucy Sharratt, Coordinator of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network. “The entire regulatory system needs urgent reform or we will see even more widespread market chaos.”

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