

SEED SECTOR REVIEW:

Undermining farmers' rights to their seed

In May 2004, the Seed Sector Review (SSR) released its *Report of the Seed Sector Advisory Committee*. If Canada moves in the direction suggested in that Report, farmers will probably lose their rights to save, re-use, and sell seeds. The following highlights some of the points raised by the Review.

Charge royalties on saved seed. The SSR's Report examines ways to collect royalties from farmers who save and re-use their own seed. The Report says: "...royalties could be collected through elevators or seed processors or through CWB contract programs." Royalties would go to seed companies, not to farmer seed growers.

Compel farmers to buy seed. The Report lists ways to "encourage" farmers to buy more Certified seed. These include a suggestion to "Link crop insurance premiums with the use of Certified seed"—requiring higher premiums from farmers who re-use their seed.

Terminate farmers' right to buy and sell common seed. Review participants repeatedly returned to the idea of requiring the use of variety names on all seed sales. Such a move would effectively outlaw the sale of "common" seed and end farmers' ability to sell seed to neighbors or to family.

Tighten the rules. Our Plant Breeders Rights' (PBR) regime is based on the UPOV (International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants) Convention. The SSR recommends replacing our "UPOV 1978" framework with the much more restrictive (for farmers) "UPOV '91" framework. That change would:

- Extend plant breeders' protection and royalty periods from the current 15 years to 20 years;
- Allow interference with farmers' right—protected in UPOV '78—to save, re-use, and sell seed;
- Empower seed companies to collect royalties on farm-saved seed at elevators and cleaners; and
- Allow patenting of seeds protected under Plant Breeders' Rights—introducing double protection.

They want to force you to pay every time you re-use your seed on your farm.

Seed companies have already increased their power and profit three ways: by merging to increase their size and reduce their competition; by expanding patent and PBR protections (further reducing competition); and by undermining public plant breeding (thus reducing competition from non-corporate breeding efforts). The changes discussed in the Seed Sector Review Report—requiring farmers to buy seed, outlawing common seed, expanding tools for royalty collection, reducing government participation—would further increase seed company power. As a result, seed prices will predictably rise.

To a significant extent, whoever controls seeds, controls agriculture. If Canada moves in the direction suggested by the SSR, farmers would lose their right to save, re-use, and sell their seeds. Farmers would essentially lose ownership of their seeds and become renters of corporate seeds.

- For a more detailed analysis of the Seed Sector Review Report, see *Nine things farmers need to know about the Seed Sector Review* at www.nfu.ca/seedsector.pdf

The flip-side of this flyer lists actions you can take to safeguard our seed supply.

Who's behind the Seed Sector Review?

The Seed Sector Review is a joint venture of the:

- Canadian Seed Growers Assoc.,
- Canadian Seed Trade Assoc. (CSTA),
- Canadian Seed Institute, and the
- Grain Growers of Canada (GGC).

CSTA's members include Agricore United, Monsanto, Sask. Wheat Pool, and Syngenta.

GGC is an umbrella group for the Western Canadian Wheat Growers, Alta. Barley Commission, Canadian Canola Growers, Ont. Corn Producers, Ont. Soybean Growers, etc.

Work with us to protect YOUR RIGHT to save, re-use, exchange, and sell seeds

The **National Farmers Union (NFU)** is fighting back on behalf of farm families and all Canadians who believe that the seeds of life are too important to be controlled by foreign transnationals. The NFU has launched an aggressive campaign that includes the following actions:

- Ads in major farm newspapers;
- Trade show displays to help inform farmers;
- A rural canvass to inform and organize farmers;
- Meetings with legislators;
- An NFU National Convention focused on seeds and farmers' rights (November 18-20, 2004 in Saskatoon);
- Meetings with urban allies to forge a rural/urban coalition around this issue;
- Press conferences, meetings with editorial boards, and other media work; and
- A petition to the federal parliament demanding that the government enshrine in legislation farmers' rights to save, re-use, select, exchange, and sell their seeds and that the government support farmers and the Canadian economy by expanding Canada's public plant breeding programs.

You can help in four ways:

1. Join the NFU. Working together, farmers can retain control of their seed supply.
2. Donate to our work. Your donation will help finance our work on this issue.
3. Spread the word. Talk to your neighbors and pass on this information.
4. Help collect signatures on our petition to parliament.

Petitions, fact sheets and additional information are available by calling, writing, faxing, visiting, or emailing the NFU office.

For two decades, the NFU has worked to maximize farmers' access to productive and affordable new seed varieties. Please join 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 below.



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