

Stop GE Alfalfa from Contaminating Canadian Farms

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Sharratt<info@cban.ca><p>CanadianFarmandConsumerGroupsUrgeU.S.DepartmentofAgriculturetoStopMonsanto?sNewGESeed

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Today a number of prominent Canadian farmer and consumer groups urged the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) not to permit the introduction of Monsanto?s genetically engineered (GE) alfalfa in the U.S., citing serious concerns about the future of organic food and farming in North America.</p><p>The USDA invite comments on their Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of allowing Monsanto?s GE (herbicide tolerant) alfalfa. Canadian groups? including the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate, Beyond Factory Farming, and the National Farmers Union- responded by submitting highly critical analyses to the USDA. They argue that GE alfalfa plantings in the U.S. would contaminate Canadian alfalfa and cause serious harm to Canadian farmers and the environment.

If the USDA disregards these and similarly critical comments from American farmers and consumers, the U.S. will likely allow GE alfalfa by the end of the summer. If the USDA decides in favour of GE alfalfa, the current court injunction on plantings in the U.S. will be lifted. Monsanto is also challenging this same injunction at the U.S. Supreme Court. The case is scheduled for argument on April 27. Should the Supreme Court find in Monsanto?s favour, it could lift the injunction pending the conclusion of the EIS.

?The USDA argues that GE contamination of alfalfa could be prevented or minimized which is ludicrous and doesn?t match the real world experience of farming, ?said Arnold Taylor of the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate (SOD). Taylor and other farmers in SOD detailed the many ways in which GE contamination would happen in their 21-

pages submission to the USDA.. ?There?s no doubt we?ll see widespread contamination of Canadian alfalfa if Monsanto gets its way in the U.S., ?said Taylor.

?Alfalfa is irreplaceable for all the benefits it brings to farmers and the soil, ?said Taylor. Alfalfa is a perennial that builds soil fertility, improving the productivity of farmland.

GE alfalfa needs variety registration before its legal to sell these seeds in Canada but our government has approved it for human and environmental safety. This means that GE alfalfa from the U.S. could legally be imported as hay for animal feed, for example.

Alfalfa is widely used as a high protein livestock feed and is referred to as the ?Queen of Forages? because of its important and unique characteristics. ?If organic farmers are forced to stop growing alfalfa due to GE contamination there will be a severe shortage of feed for certified organic livestock and dairy cows. This will limit this important and growing sector of the food system, ?said Cathy Holtslander of Beyond Factory Farming.

?Conventional and organic alfalfa growers in Canada agree that GE alfalfa would be a utter disaster for our markets? says Maggie Mumm an organic alfalfa seed producer and co-owner of Mumm?s Sprouting Seeds, ?We know from the current flax contamination crisis that GE contamination can cost farmers dearly. ?

107 farmer and consumer groups have so far signed a statement against GE alfalfa.

?We can?t allow Monsanto?s GE seeds to destroy the livelihoods of farmers and jeopardize the future of organic farming, ?said Lucy Sharratt, Coordinator of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network.

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