

Widespread Call Issued to Stop GM Alfalfa in Canada 80 groups to fight the commercialization of genetically modified alfalfa

Press Release April 28, 2009

Ottawa – Today, 80 groups including farmer associations and food businesses from across Canada joined the growing call to stop the introduction and field-testing of genetically modified (GM) alfalfa.

The alfalfa in question is genetically modified by Monsanto to be tolerant to the company's brand name herbicide Roundup. Alfalfa would be the first perennial GM crop on the market.

“The contamination of alfalfa would be inevitable and irreversible. We've already seen an end to organic canola due to GM contamination and we can't afford to lose alfalfa,” said Arnold Taylor of the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate. “Because it's pollinated by bees, genes from Monsanto's GM alfalfa would spread out of control.”

Alfalfa is an important crop for all farmers, both organic and conventional, as a soil builder by fixing nitrogen, as a clean-up crop to end weed infestations, and as feed for dairy cattle and other animals. "Farmers universally see no reason for GM alfalfa. Monsanto is the only beneficiary. The company would gain by selling more Roundup and by controlling yet another crop through its gene patents, which in all other Roundup Ready crops in Canada, have disallowed farmers from saving seed," said Terry Boehm, Vice President of the National Farmers Union.

GM alfalfa was approved by the Canadian government in 2005 but cannot be commercialized until Monsanto and Forage Genetics International seek and meet registration requirements for the variety. In the U.S., a Federal court revoked approval for GM alfalfa, ruling that a full environmental assessment was needed, citing risks to farmers and the environment.

The 80 groups that signed the “No to GM Alfalfa” letter include farmer associations, farm businesses, sprouting and seed companies, food retailers, and public interest groups. The groups oppose the sale, trade and production of GM alfalfa and are asking the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to reassess its approval of GM alfalfa.

“The response from diverse groups across Canada in support of this position is huge. This is only the beginning of strong opposition to GM alfalfa as there is so much at stake for consumers and farmers alike,” said Lucy Sharratt, Coordinator of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, a coalition of 18 groups. “The government must recognize the predictable and devastating environmental and economic costs of GM alfalfa and revoke approval now, rather than wait until after its too late and farmers have lost their crops and livelihoods to contamination.”

Carmen Wakeling of Eatmore Sprouts & Greens Ltd. in BC said that, "Over time the availability of certified organic alfalfa seed would disappear, creating severe challenges for seed and sprout growers. Ultimately, GM alfalfa would have major repercussions on certified organic food producers throughout Canada and the U.S., no matter what they are making or growing".

Urban consumers are also extremely concerned about the introduction of GM alfalfa. “Canadian consumers are becoming more and more educated about GM foods and are increasingly looking for organic products,” said Dag Falck, Organic Program Manager for Nature's Path, a major manufacturer of organic cereals in North America. “Its essential that we ensure consumers retain the

option to buy non-GM foods."

"Our customers are very clear that they don't want to eat GM foods, and that includes honey, milk and meat that would be effected by GM alfalfa," said Julie Daniluk of The Big Carrot food store in Toronto.

The 80 groups will work together to stop the commercialization of GM alfalfa in Canada and have formed a "No to GM Alfalfa" campaign to protect the crop.

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