

Media Backgrounder

January 10, 2004

Although we welcome the Jan 9th announcement by AAFC to stop investment in Monsanto's Roundup Ready (RR) wheat, millions of Canadian citizens' taxpayer dollars have already been squandered on RR wheat since 1997. This wheat has been genetically engineered to be tolerant to glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto's herbicide Roundup.

There are other steps needed to be taken to stop the threat of GE wheat to our farms, the economy, seed and food supply, public health and the environment as a whole. Consider the following points:

- We presume that the AAFC announcement means stopping the Sept 11, 1997 eight year 'Collaborative Research Agreement' between the federal government and Monsanto Canada Inc that clearly states AAFC's role as the developer of RR wheat for commercialization.
See <<http://www.healthcoalition.ca/monsanto-sweetheart-deal.pdf>>
- Monsanto's Dec 23, 2002 application for regulatory approval of RR wheat is still pending. This application to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is for general cultivation (unconfined environmental release) and for livestock feed. Health Canada received a submission from Monsanto Canada Inc. on July 31, 2002. Health Canada is responsible for approving novel foods (such as those derived from GE wheat) for human consumption.
See <http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/plaveg/bio/monsane.shtml>
- AAFC officials have been Monsanto's spokespersons on RR wheat. Indeed, their lead investigator on RR wheat at the start of the 1997 Collaborative Research Agreement is now a key Monsanto official on the RR wheat portfolio.
- 53 confined research field trials of novel wheat were conducted in 2002, 46 were tests of Monsanto GE wheat including 12 test plots for the Western Canadian Private Bread Wheat Registration Trial. Isolation perimeter zones surrounding RR wheat confined field test plots are set at only 30 metres, when it is known that wheat pollen can drift much further.
- AAFC Scott Experimental Farm (a satellite of the Saskatoon AAFC Research Station) has been growing RR wheat in test plots since 1998.
- RR wheat plots have been grown on land rented or leased from private land owners such as the 2002 and 2003 plots at Aberdeen, Saskatchewan. See OAPF website News link item: Saskatchewan News Network, August 09, 2003 'Lining up against GM wheat' at <http://www.saskorganic.com/oapf/news.html>
- Stopping further growing of RR wheat includes AAFC test plots, private land plots including Monsanto's own research land and facilities necessitates extensive cleanup of these sites and extended monitoring over and above current Canadian Food Inspection Agency's protocol of 2 years.
http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/plaveg/bio/dir/dir0007appe.shtml#APPENDIX_2
- Canada's markets for wheat have been put at risk by AAFC's involvement as a promoter and developer of RR wheat which conflicts with their role as the regulator of GE wheat. Over 80% of the Canadian Wheat Board's importers have said no to Roundup Ready wheat. In Japan, for example, there is a strong movement against GE wheat that warns us that Canada could lose all wheat markets for that country.

- A Recent AAFC research study appears to show a definitive link to increased fusarium head blight because of glyphosate use; therefore the commercialization of RR wheat would unquestionably compound that problem which is a serious health safety concern besides being a serious agronomic and economic concern. See the National Farmers Union December 11 news release <http://www.nfu.ca/section1.html> and the study abstract at: http://www.umanitoba.ca/afs/agronomists_conf/fernandez.html
- On February 19, 2002 Arnold Taylor represented the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate (SOD) at a House of Commons Agriculture Committee hearing in Davidson <http://www.saskorganic.com/oapf/lobby.html> and made clear our opposition to GE wheat and canola and the overall threat of genetic engineered crops to organic production.
- On June 26, 2002 the OAPF was successful in getting a key study released by AAFC that discloses that growers producing Certified canola seed for the conventional canola market cannot prevent genetic contamination of their seed by Monsanto's RR Canola <http://www.saskorganic.com/oapf/class-action.html> Monsanto's RR wheat poses a very similar threat to seed stock contamination for all classes of wheat grown in Canada.
- There have been repeated requests to the federal agriculture ministry to revamp the regulatory approval process for plants with novel traits (ie: genetically engineered/transgenic crops); there has been no change. Some of the required changes include adding socio-economic and market impact criteria, replacing the 'substantial equivalence' decision threshold with sound independent scientific scrutiny, and providing for public consultation prior to releasing GE crops.
- The variety registration process, starting with the Prairie Registration Recommending Committee for Grain, must also entrench market impact criteria in their operating procedures.
- Three leading plant scientists from the University of Manitoba have concluded that the unconfined release of Monsanto's Roundup Ready wheat in Western Canada poses an unacceptable level of environmental risk. On July 9, 2003 the Canadian Wheat Board put out a news release to highlight this study. <http://www.cwb.ca/en/news/releases/2003/070903.jsp> "*The unconfined release of Roundup Ready wheat will negatively affect the environment and limit farmers' ability to conserve natural resources on farms in Western Canada.*" noted Dr. Rene Van Acker, Dr. Anita Brûlé-Babel and Lyle Friesen in their report. <http://www.cwb.ca/en/topics/biotechnology/report/index.jsp>
- Monsanto has argued that GE crops such as RR wheat give farmers choice. The reality is that they appear to give choice to some, but take choice away from everyone else, including the consumer.
- The position paper on GMOs lays out the foundation for the decision to go ahead with the class action lawsuit. <http://www.saskorganic.com/oapf/legal.html>

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For details about the OAPF legal action see www.saskorganic.com