

Jan. 10, 2002

Statement: Joan Harrison, SOD Secretary and consumer Director

As Arnold mentioned, my name is Joan Harrison. I am the non-farmer member of the SOD board of directors. I am here today to represent a consumer perspective.

My experience as an organic consumer began in the early 1970's as a university student living on a pretty tight budget. In those days we had to create our own stores and so I worked with others to do just that. We used the co-op approach – first Magpie Co-op then Steephill, which operates very successfully to this day. The ideas that drove me and many others to make the effort to grow organic gardens and buy organic food remain pretty much what they were 25 or thirty years ago. We were concerned about health and wanted to avoid pesticides and over processed foods. We were concerned about the environment and wanted to support farmers using a kind of agriculture that worked with nature.

The reasons for me and others to choose organic foods have been increased by one substantial point in the intervening years. Since the midninties, more and more of the soybeans, corn and canola grown in North America have been genetically modified varieties. Certified organic products are one of the few reliable ways to purchase non-GMO products.

As a consumer, I have decided that genetically modified foods pose a potential health risk that I would rather avoid. I am not alone. The last decade has seen a considerable increase in the number of people seeking out organic products. Here in Saskatoon, sales at Steephill Food Co-op have tripled in that period.

Currently organic food sales in Canada sit at about 1 billion dollars per year. Given the annual growth of about 20% annually, it is anticipated that organic sales will reach 3.5 billion dollars by 2005. A recent U.S. study indicates that one third of the food consumers are buying some organic items which are now commonly available in many supermarkets. Western Europeans have embraced organic food even more enthusiastically, with the Danish leading the way.

As a consumer, I feel that it is very important to support organic farmers in their effort to stop the introduction of more GMO food crops. Wheat is a very basic food. It is hard to eat a meal that does not include it in some form: bread, buns, donuts, cookies or pasta. If genetically engineered wheat is registered in Canada and grown on the Canadian prairies, then the inevitable genetic pollution will occur. If this happens, our local organic farmers will lose a very important crop and I and other Saskatchewan consumers will be in the ridiculous position of having to buy organic wheat grown elsewhere.