

January 10, 2002

Statement by Marc Loiselle, co-chair of SOD Research Committee

Good afternoon. I am Marc Loiselle. Je m'appelle Marc Loiselle et je serai disponible à répondre aux questions en français. I am a SOD director and also a committee member of the Organic Agriculture Protection Fund.

My family and I live on the farm at Vonda. We started farming organically in 1985 and currently manage 1440 acres with cereal, oilseed, pulse, forage crops and livestock.

The attraction to this method of farming came primarily from our desire to be better stewards of the land and resources, without the use of toxic substances. We believed that it was morally and ethically unacceptable to continue to grow food in such a way that could threaten our health, the health of others, and the environment at large. Organic farming has provided us with an enriched way of life in many ways, including economic benefit.

As part of the growing number of organic farmers, we believe that our agricultural system must be economically viable, environmentally sound, socially just, and meets the needs of today without compromising the needs of future generations.

Therefore as a whole, organic farmers reject the philosophy that we must poison our environment or use radical genetic engineering of plants and animals to produce enough food for us all to eat.

Genetic engineering is not about feeding the world; it's about feeding the companies that are the promoters!

Organic certification is a system of institutionalized trust, allowing consumers to identify and reward conscientious stewards of our natural heritage.

Certification is a stringent process that includes adherence to set standards, annual inspections, detailed audit trailing of all aspects of production, processing and transactions. Organic certification standards are developed to adhere to consumer demand. These standards prohibit the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The organic market depends on being able to supply food that is produced without toxic pesticides and genetic engineering. If we cannot grow crops free of unintended genetic contamination, we are not able to service those markets, resulting in the loss of our ability to be financially sustainable and resulting in loss of choice for you the consumer.

In Saskatchewan we are directly affected by the introduction of GE herbicide tolerant canola and possibly wheat in the very near future if it is not stopped soon. As has been demonstrated, GE canola and other GE crops cannot be contained within specific fields because of the genetic drift of their novel traits (such as the Roundup Ready gene) by the spreading of pollen and seed. GE wheat will be no different.

To date there is only preliminary research and data on just how extensively wheat pollen travels. Let's not forget that we can be subject to extreme climatic activity in Saskatchewan.

Organic farmers, along with other farmers, marketers, researchers and consumers are saying that management practices, detection technology, or segregation systems will not prevent GE wheat from contaminating fields, seed and feed supplies and food shipments.

We cannot put faith in a post-harvest segregation system for GE wheat, when it can't even be segregated in the field when it's growing!

The buffer zones, or isolation strips, that we certified organic producers maintain adjacent to neighbouring fields, are intended to buffer and warn against pesticide drift, not drift of genetic material from other plants, especially GE plants!

If farmers don't take a stand on limits to patenting and how biotechnology is used to alter seeds such as wheat; we risk losing market access, loss of income, loss of choice; as well as losing control over what we produce, how we produce it, what value it has, and who will buy it. This would also be an unacceptable situation for consumers who are ultimately the market for the food that we produce.

It is difficult to believe that any good will come of biotechnology for food development after the track record we've seen over the past years. In the quest and rush to provide genetically engineered food, efforts towards the common good and democratic process & freedom are being shunned.

We are formally asking the federal government to do a full environmental assessment that considers the overall socio-economic impact of GE wheat. A letter to that effect is being sent to our Canadian Agriculture Minister, Lyle Vanclief. Copy of the letter will be available on the SOD website in a few days.

Despite concerted efforts by Canadians concerned about GE crops and foods, on-going lobbying efforts to get full public hearings on the issue of GE wheat, including efforts to have changes in the grain variety registration process, overhauling the regulatory process, and enacting a moratorium; to date there has been no action. We hope that does not remain so.

Organic farmers in Saskatchewan have said that the time has come for this legal challenge and we are here today to let the world know that. We claim that the 2 companies Monsanto and Aventis are responsible for GE contamination on multiple grounds, and we're confident that will be proven in the court of law.

I want the freedom to grow what I want and what the consumer demands, without GMOs.

I want to be able to continue to farm organically and I want my children and generations to come, to have that same opportunity.

I want to see the success story that is organic farming, continue to flourish in Saskatchewan and elsewhere.

I believe many other people also want this and will support our efforts.

The right to farm GMO free -- the right to eat GMO free -- that is what's at stake here!