

Saskatchewan Organic Directorate (SOD)

Statement to the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry November 8, 2001

My name is Marc Loiselle. I have been an active farm producer of certified organic food crops for 16 years and am currently a Director of the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate (SOD).

The SOD is unequivocally opposed to any further introduction of genetically engineered (GE) / transgenic crops because of the threat they pose to the integrity and viability of organic food and fibre production¹. Worldwide, there is a **zero** tolerance level for genetically modified organisms in certified organic food as outlined by product certification standards and demanded by traders, processors and consumers². If a minimal tolerance level were to be established, it would be impossible to maintain due to the inevitability of steadily increasing contamination by GE crops. Transgenic crops cannot be contained within specific growing areas, in research plots and farmers' fields, as genetic drift of their novel traits will occur by the spreading of pollen and seed, by wind, water, animal, and human activity. Contamination from GE wheat will occur; just as contamination by transgenic canola has already resulted in the loss of the certified organic canola market.

Despite requests to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and provincial agriculture departments about the location of GE wheat test sites, they claim this is confidential business information and location information will remain secret; and yet they want to know where all the organic farms are located. Government approved secrecy surrounding the location of GE wheat test plot sites within Canada has already infringed on our rights as producers.

The proposed commercial introduction of transgenic herbicide tolerant wheat and the consequent genetic contamination of other wheat varieties, will make it impossible for farmers to have a clear choice about the type of wheat they grow. In addition there are profound long-term implications for research and development of future wheat varieties due to the contamination of wheat seed stocks, seed collections, breeder lines and gene banks. There is no management practice, detection technology, or segregation system that will prevent GE wheat from contaminating fields, food shipments, and feed supplies. Loss of certification for organic wheat, loss of market opportunity and income, adverse effects on food safety and environmental impact, loss of choice for consumers are all unacceptable. Ultimately, the rights of consumers are paramount and must be respected; they are the market and create the demand. Adoption of certified organic food production to meet growing demands is being jeopardized by the uncontrollable use of and contamination by transgenic crops. Introduction of the GE wheat will do nothing to reduce toxic chemical usage, provide wholesome uncontaminated food or even to produce more food as is claimed; but will profit the GE companies at the expense of farmers, consumers, communities, and the common good of all Canadians. The right to farm and consume food free of GMOs and GE wheat is being threatened. It jeopardizes Canada's unique reputation as a producer of high quality food commodities.

Because of the large area sown to wheat in Canada, its valued importance as a staple food and as an essential crop in maintaining necessary crop rotations; the approval of GE wheat would be devastating. The introduction of GE wheat would pose a grave threat to the viability of the growing number of organic grain farms in Canada. Wheat is a major crop in organic grain production because of three important features: its relative drought tolerance, its competitiveness with weeds, and its marketability. The forced elimination of wheat from organic crop rotations due to contamination by GE wheat would therefore jeopardize the agronomic and economic viability of organic farming on the Canadian prairies. Organic agriculture is the fastest growing sector of the global food systems. In Canada it has both small and large acreages, is diverse,

¹ see SOD Position Paper regarding Genetically Modified Organisms at <http://www.saskorganic.com/>

² National Standard of Canada for Organic Agriculture via Canadian General Standards Board, Ottawa 819-956-0425

is largely export oriented, and is successful without government subsidies. The introduction of GE wheat in Canada threatens this vital sector in Canadian agriculture, the brightest hope on the agricultural horizon. - more--

>Is the Canadian government acting upon the many good recommendations that the Royal Society of Canada Expert Panel on the Future of Food Biotechnology delivered in their February 5, 2001 report entitled *Elements of Precaution: Recommendations for the Regulation of Food Biotechnology in Canada*?³ or is this important work being largely ignored?

>Why has government moved away from public accountability?

>Who will be held responsible for the biological pollution?

>Will GE wheat be given comprehensive federal agronomic and environmental assessment reviews under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act; apart from the standard regulatory system which is fundamentally flawed?

Governments have demonstrated serious conflicts of interest as they simultaneously act as investors **in** and regulators **of** GE food.

>Will government continue to provide public resources for the biotech industry to research GE wheat, then allow private companies to patent and own it? In a democracy, governments are to serve the common good, but increasingly we are seeing the corporate agenda take precedence over the rights of farmers and consumers.

The SOD believes it is imperative that the Canadian government adhere to the Precautionary Principle and act immediately to **stop** further development, approval, and commercial release of GE wheat!

About the Organization

The Saskatchewan Organic Directorate is the umbrella organization uniting producers, processors, buyer/traders, certifiers, and consumers of organic food and fibre. SOD's mission statement is: "To champion the development of organic agriculture in a democratic manner." Its vision is: "Food for Life". The SOD released a Position Paper Regarding GMOs on April 18, 2001. This document can be obtained by contacting the SOD office or from today's spokesperson.

About the Speaker:

Marc Loiselle has farmed organically with his family since 1985 at Vonda, SK. His certified organic production includes grain, oilseeds, pulse, forage crops, and livestock. He is President of the Northwest Saskatchewan Organic Producers (NWSOP) also known as the Saskatchewan Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA) Saskatchewan #2 Chapter; a board member of the Canadian Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CCSA); and a Director representative for NWSOP on the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate. Within SOD he has taken an active role in campaigning against the proliferation of genetically modified organisms. He is the Director of communications and research for the SOD's Organic Agriculture Protection Fund (OAPF), launched October 12, 2001.

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Available for interviews in both french and english.

³ see Royal Society of Canada website: <http://www.rsc.ca/> for press release, summary statement, or full report