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## **Get facts straight about GM opponents**

By Marc Loiselle

*Following is the personal viewpoint of the writer, a Vonda-area resident and communications and research director for the Organic Agriculture Protection Fund, Saskatchewan Organic Directorate*

In comparison to the editorial *Lousy optics in wheat deal* (SP Dec. 2), which I applaud for making strong points on why we need to stop GE wheat, the editorial *GM food poll badly skewed* (SP Dec. 5) was shockingly ignorant and offensive.

Labeling organic farmers such as I as “anti-GM fearmongers” is ridiculous. Many other farmers who have not adopted certified organic farm management are just as opposed to the use of GM canola and to the introduction of more GM crops.

Reasons for this opposition include issues of contamination, marketing, food safety and security, patenting of life, and control of our seed and food sectors. Increasing evidence supports a strong movement against GM crops and foods – based on science, common sense and factual experience.

Organic farmers in Saskatchewan have been hardest hit by the introduction of GM canola. We have lost our ability to grow certified organic canola because of the extent of contamination of seed stocks, the ubiquitous nature of gene transfer from pollen drift and the spread of GM canola seeds and plants by wind, wildlife, equipment and transportation. Our class action lawsuit against Monsanto Canada and Bayer Cropscience is based on this claim and others, including questions of liability, negligence and trespassing.

Let's get another thing clear on terminology. In the current worldwide debate, the terms “genetically modified,” “genetically engineered” or “transgenic” are used interchangeably and understood to describe the same thing. They describe techniques, using recombinant DNA, by which the natural genetic material of plants are altered in ways that could not be obtained by methods of natural reproduction or natural recombination. A genetically modified organism (GMO) is a plant, animal or microorganism transformed by genetic engineering.

Therefore, the line “products that have undergone genetic engineering over 12,000 years of farming practices.” is clearly nonsense. Sure, there has been natural genetic change throughout history, but it never involved introducing genetic material into unrelated species. That is possible only now, by invasively forcing the host organism to accept foreign genes.

The editorial said the Royal Society of Canada and Health Canada experts have deemed GM foods pose “absolutely no danger to human or animal health”. You would not have written that had you read the Feb. 5, 2001 report by the society's Expert Panel on the Future of Food Biotechnology called *Elements of Precaution: Recommendations for the Regulation of Food Biotechnology in Canada*.

It's clear that many people do not trust government agencies such as Health Canada or the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to be unbiased and thorough when they investigate and test for safety and health concerns.

The regulatory system that allows GM crops and foods to be grown and sold in Canada is fundamentally inadequate and flawed. It consists primarily of determining approval based on a decision threshold, something called “substantial equivalence”

which, in the words of the expert panel, is "scientifically unjustifiable when used to exempt new products from full scientific scrutiny. When it comes to human and environmental safety, there should be clear evidence of the absence of risks; the mere absence of evidence is not enough."

As regards genetically engineering our food, it is abundantly clear that not abiding by the precautionary principle leads to many problems that are very difficult to undo.

While Monsanto argues that GM crops give farmers choice, the reality is that they appear to give choice to some, but take choice away from everyone else, including the consumer. Add in no effective labeling of foods containing GMOs and we end up with what we have now; a system that profits only the patent holding companies and their subsidiaries, while Canada's citizens and its environment are subjected to wholesale experimentation.

As with far too many politicians, editors appear to be chameleons when it comes to forming a position on issues of great importance such as genetic engineering of our food. For the sake of consumers like SP readers, don't publish accusations of manipulation by what you call "pressure groups" unless you have investigated thoroughly what you claim. Otherwise you leave yourself wide open to criticism.