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Oxitec's GM Moths Released in New York – Citizens, Organic Farmers and Environmentalists Are Outraged

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Biotech company Oxitec has released genetically engineered (GE) diamondback moths at Cornell's agricultural experiment station in Geneva, New York as part of an outdoor trial, and New Yorkers are more than just miffed.

Organic farmers, environmental groups, and New York citizens have sent a letter to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and Agriculture Commissioner Richard Ball along with Cornell University President David Skorton and Agricultural School Associate Dean Susan Brown **demanding that field trials stop and to provide information to the public about the release of these GM moths.**

Oxitec proposed field trials of their GE diamondback moth in September of 2014 to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This is more than likely the first time you are hearing of it.

While Oxitec claims they have had a genetic engineering breakthrough with their GM moth, since the diamondback is indeed a huge agricultural nuisance which damages thousands of acres annually, costing farmers more than $1 billion, they have no idea if their GM moths will cause even more damage.

This Isn't the First Oxitec Disaster

As Natural Society previously reported, GM moths look to be no better than the GM mosquitoes that are planned for release in the Florida Keys. Oxitec has ties to Syngenta, so it is likely that they aren't trying to breed out a nuisance moth, but create a super-pest that will make it easier to sell even more pesticides and herbicides.

Furthermore, are we trust the premise for the GM moth's creation? When Oxitec wanted to release GM mosquitoes I Panama and Florida it was supposedly to control dengue which is spread by the Aedes mosquitoes, but the US hasn't seen but a handful of dengue fever cases in the past several decades. Oxitec's GM mosquitoes have a genetic 'kill switch' but no one is sure if it will work on just the GM variety or also on the bugs that interbreed with the GM 'test' insects. This is likely what we can expect with their GM moths.

Speaking to a Key Haven, Florida resident recently, it became apparent that Oxitec didn't listen to neighborhood surveys that overwhelmingly were against the release of GM mosquitoes, so it is unlikely that the biotech company will listen to a letter. But what other recourse does a New York resident have? Certainly Florida residents didn't sign up to be inundated with millions of GM mosquitoes carrying kill switch genes, which not only affect

their ecosystem, but likely human health.

In fact, Oxitec and the FDA seem to be working together to deny citizen's rights altogether. The concerned Key Haven resident I spoke with, Beth Eliot, said that in the last Florida Keys Mosquito Control District Board Meeting which she attended, public comments which were allowed at the meeting were *against* the release of these GM bugs. However, the District reports support of the release, even when door to door surveys conducted by FKMCD have painted a very different picture.

The Public is Repeatedly Ignored

It seems the decision to release these GM moths in New York is no different. Wenonah Hauter, Executive Director of Food & Water Watch says:

> "This release of genetically engineered autocidal moths is the first of its kind in the United States and it sets a very poor precedent that they were released with minimal environmental review and transparency. The USDA's irresponsible management of this genetically engineered insect is putting the environment and agriculture at risk."

It may be the first release of its kind regarding GM moths, but Oxitec has already set precedence for working with the FDA to ignore public opinion and go ahead with its master plan. There has been no press release, and no forum for public discourse on the subject – though it is largely assumed, that just as with the GM mosquitoes, no one is looking for more genetically modified pests to be let loose in their neighborhoods.

Similarly to the release of Oxitec's first round of GM insects, the USDA did not contact the organizations who opposed this release to address their many concerns, and months later, the groups only found out about the impending release through unrelated correspondence with the USDA that the GE moth permit had been quietly approved.

Why the Secrecy?

The big question here is why the secrecy? If these GM insects are so harmless, then why not simply inform the public? When comments were open for the USDA to take preventative measures, the overwhelming outrage was simply ignored.

Jaydee Hanson, Senior Policy Analyst at Center for Food Safety says:

> "The first use of GE insects in an agricultural setting should have required public consultations with potentially affected parties, as well as, trials in physically enclosed spaces before even considering open field trials. This violates one of the basic principles of biosafety for genetically engineered organisms—that they should be physically constrained in trials, not openly released."

Oxitec's Methods Have Already Failed

As Collective Evolution points out:

> “Oxitec has already released a large number of GM olive flies that were used to kill off wild pests that damage crops. In the Cayman Islands, 3 million GM mosquitoes were released, and in this case over 90 percent of the original natural native mosquito population was suppressed. The same results were also seen in Brazil. (source)
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> Supporters of the GM insects, like Oxitec, claim that those who oppose the idea are simply fear mongering. This is currently the same response from the big biotech giants to opposers of genetically modified foods.”

I have one phrase for Oxitec and the USDA. Karma’s a B@#ch.

To read the letter sent in opposition of the New York GM moth release, look here: fwwat.ch/1FIVQid

Additional Sources:

Featured image sourced from: Oxitec

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