

The Monsanto Engame: Genetically Engineered Wheat in Oregon, Concerns of Contamination across North America

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Unapproved GE Wheat Found on Oregon Farm Raises Contamination Concerns

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(Saskatoon) – Genetically engineered (GE) winter wheat was found in the USA this spring when an Oregon farmer noticed volunteer wheat that survived after he sprayed with glyphosate (Roundup) in preparation for spring seeding. Yesterday, the USDA confirmed that it is Monsanto’s Roundup Ready Wheat, which has not been approved in the USA or anywhere else in the world. The GE wheat was tested in experimental field plots in 16 states between 1998 and 2005. The last test in Oregon was in 2001.

“Of course the first thing that comes to mind on hearing this news is the GE Triffid flax contamination disaster, which cost Canadian farmers multi millions of dollars in lost sales, reduced prices, testing and massive efforts to eradicate the rogue seed from our system ten years after we thought we had gotten rid of it by getting it de-registered and destroying seed stocks before it went to market,” said Terry Boehm, National Farmers Union President. “Now, unfortunately, American farmers may well be facing the same type of situation with their winter wheat.”

“It is highly unlikely that this particular US contamination problem has spread to Canada because of our strict rules around importation of seed, however, it is both a warning and a lesson for Canada’s regulatory system,” Boehm continued. “Monsanto was allowed to do field testing of Roundup Ready wheat in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba from 1998 until 2004. It was only after intense pressure from farmers that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency tightened up the GE wheat testing protocol to somewhat reduce the risk of contamination.”

American wheat farmers are now very worried about losing export markets and suffering price discounts as a result of this confirmed contamination incident. If this happens, their losses could be enormous.

“Consider the liability issues. Why is a biotech company such as Monsanto allowed get away with setting loose their unapproved genetic material via experimental field tests and yet pay none of the consequences when it escapes?” asked Glenn Tait, NFU Board member. “The

market impacts of contamination are always borne by farmers who had no say in whether, how, or where these field tests took place. This is an injustice and it is not acceptable.”

Canada’s legal system does not address GE contamination liability matters, nor does the regulatory system consider the market impacts of genetically engineered crops or the effects of contamination on farmers who choose not to grow them. “Canada should not allow any new GE crops – such as Roundup Ready Alfalfa — to be field tested, approved or sold until the regulatory system is revamped to take both market issues and contamination risks seriously.”

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