



Stop GM Contamination in Canada

GM ALFALFA

Stop Further Market Release

A small amount of genetically modified (GM or genetically engineered) alfalfa seed was sold in Eastern Canada in 2016 for the first time. This alfalfa has GM traits for glyphosate-tolerance (Roundup Ready) plus low-lignin, and is being sold by Forage Genetics International. **It is estimated that 3,000 hectares of GM alfalfa were planted in Eastern Canada in 2017.** In 2017, US farmers planted 1.14 million hectares of Roundup Ready alfalfa and 80,000 hectares that also included the low-lignin trait.

GM alfalfa is not registered for use in Western Canada yet and the company says it has no immediate plans to sell GM alfalfa in Western Canada.

Because alfalfa is a perennial plant that is pollinated by bees, GM contamination of non-GM alfalfa is unavoidable. The role of human error/behaviour in handling GM alfalfa seed and hay is also a known risk. There are several ways in which gene flow from GM to non-GM alfalfa can occur: seed escape, pollinator-mediated gene flow, and gene flow through volunteer and feral alfalfa.

There are two documented cases of contamination from GM alfalfa in the US and one reported incident in Canada. In 2013, exports from a farmer in Washington state were rejected when buyers tested for and found contamination. In 2016, a team of US Department of Agriculture scientists confirmed GM alfalfa has dispersed widely into the environment in the US. In 2016, a farmer in Alberta anonymously reported that foundation seed he ordered four years earlier was contaminated.

Past experiences with GM flax and GM canola in Canada further warn of the inevitability of gene flow and the consequences of GM contamination, including the risk to certified seed.

Action:

The only way to prevent contamination from GM alfalfa is to stop any further market release.

GM WHEAT

Stop Outdoor Field Tests

Field-testing genetically modified crops puts farmers' livelihoods, our export markets, and our environment at risk of contamination from escaped experimental GM crop plants. The 2018 discovery of unapproved GM wheat plants growing on a road in Alberta warns of the risks from outdoor experiments.

We may never know how this GM wheat came to be present on an access road.

— CFIA

On June 14, 2018, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) announced that several unapproved genetically engineered wheat plants had been found on a roadside in Alberta in 2017. The plants contained Monsanto's GM trait for glyphosate-tolerance.

The cause of contamination is unknown. The CFIA finished its investigation but has no answers. The CFIA could not establish a direct link between this contamination incident and past GM wheat field tests in Canada, but it could not rule out a link: "Given the passage of time and large

distances involved, there is no evidence that would explain how or if the current GM wheat finding is linked with a previous trial."The CFIA did however rule out any connection to previous US GM wheat contamination incidents.

Fortunately, this was an isolated incident. The CFIA did not find any GM wheat outside the "highly localized area" on the road where the few plants were found. The CFIA will monitor the site for the next three years.

This contamination did not enter the food system. The GM wheat plants found in Alberta were not a genetic match for any of the registered wheat seed varieties currently grown in Canada, nor for any varieties sent in shipments from Canada over the past three years. South Korea and Japan resumed imports after their testing found no GM wheat.

No country has approved any GM wheat for growing or eating. In 2004, Monsanto withdrew its request for approval in Canada and the US for the first-ever GM wheat (Roundup Ready) because of farmer and consumer protest.

The rogue wheat plants contained the GM event called MON71200 that was field tested by Monsanto from 1998-2000 in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Monsanto continued to field test other GM herbicide-tolerant wheat in Canada up to 2004 and other companies have continued to field-test GM wheats over the years.

The CFIA says it will review this incident and "any areas identified for improvement will be pursued."

The only way to prevent these incidents happening in the future is to ban outdoor testing.

— Terry Boehm, Chair of the NFU Seed Committee, 2018

Action:

The National Farmers Union (NFU) is asking the CFIA to disclose the locations of all current and past open-air test plots of genetically modified wheat so that farmers and others can be on the look-out for escapes and assist in the eradication of contamination risks if additional genetically modified plants are found.

The National Farmers Union has called for a ban on outdoor field tests. The NFU has called for the elimination of open-air testing of genetically modified crops since 2001 because "the potential impact on farmers' livelihoods and the Canadian economy that would occur if contamination resulted in permanently closed markets is an unacceptable risk."

TAKE ACTION

SEND A LETTER INSTANTLY to the Minister of Agriculture, asking for a ban on open-air tests of GM crops at

cban.ca/take-action/wheataction/

SHARE this action through social media.

For more information and details: **www.cban.ca/wheat**



cban.ca

The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN) brings together 16 organizations to research, monitor and raise awareness about issues relating to genetic engineering in food and farming. CBAN members include farmer associations, environmental and social justice organizations, and regional coalitions of grassroots groups. CBAN is a project on Tides Canada's shared platform. **www.cban.ca**