

Letter to International Trade Minister, The Honourable Mary Ng  
RE: The need for Canada to support Mexico's phase out of GM corn and glyphosate

The Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development

[mary.ng@parl.gc.ca](mailto:mary.ng@parl.gc.ca)

CC: The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food,  
[minister\\_ministre@agr.gc.ca](mailto:minister_ministre@agr.gc.ca)

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Dear Minister Ng,

The Government of Canada has, according to media reports, requested formal talks with the Government of Mexico over its decree to phase out genetically modified (GM) corn and the herbicide glyphosate, on the heels of a US government request for formal consultations with the Mexican government under the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) Chapter of the Canada-United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (CUSMA).

We are writing to raise our concerns that the federal government has requested these talks in order to apply pressure on the Government of Mexico to reverse its decision. Prior to the January 10, 2023 North American Leaders' Summit in Mexico City, you were sent a letter signed by 28 Canadian organizations asking the federal government to support Mexico in its phase out of GM corn and glyphosate. We are writing to reiterate this request.

Though we have yet to receive a response to the January letter, media reported your press secretary stating support for securing market access for genetically modified organisms (GMOs). However, we stress that the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) does not oblige any country to approve a GMO that is approved in another country, and it does not require countries to accept the scientific assessments and risk calculations of other countries. CUSMA mandates transparency, consultation, and science-based decision-making. Mexico retains the right to take the precautionary measures it deems necessary to protect public health and the environment.

The press secretary also referred to Canada's commitment to "science-based decision-making," however Mexico's highest government science body has published an extensive database of information on the risks of glyphosate and GM corn, with 28 pages of citations. We remain concerned that Canada itself is not implementing science-based decision-making domestically in relation to the safety of GMOs and herbicides. Instead, the federal government is moving towards a complete reliance on unseen corporate safety assessments and confidential corporate science, without independent government oversight, for future genetically modified (gene edited) foods and seeds. This approach jeopardizes food safety, our environment, and the livelihood of many Canadian farmers.

All of the GM crops currently cultivated in Canada, and the vast majority grown in the US, are herbicide-tolerant (most are tolerant to glyphosate-based herbicides). These GM crops are twinned with the application of specific herbicides. In Canada, herbicide sales have increased by 234% since GM crops have been introduced (1994-2020), and the COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada) assessment and status report on the Monarch butterfly stated that the critical decline in Monarch habitat is strongly correlated with the use of herbicide-tolerant crops. In 2015, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer determined that glyphosate is a probable human carcinogen and a 2019 meta-analysis of human epidemiological studies suggests a compelling link between exposures to glyphosate-based herbicides and an increased risk for non-Hodgkin lymphoma. Four environmental groups in Canada have (January 24, 2023) filed a judicial review application in Federal Court, challenging Health Canada's failure to conduct a rigorous scientific assessment of glyphosate before renewing the approval of a product containing glyphosate.

Mexico's highest court upheld a 2013 injunction on the cultivation of genetically modified corn because the risk of GM contamination poses a credible threat to Mexico's rich store of native corn biodiversity. Canada should support Mexico's objective to protect the world's centre of diversity of corn.

Canada should support Mexico's objectives to achieve self-sufficiency and food sovereignty as it seeks to replace GM corn and glyphosate with "sustainable and culturally appropriate" alternatives. We ask that Canada accept the sovereign decision of Mexico to secure and rebuild its historic corn-based social, cultural, and economic legacy.

Indeed, Canada should follow Mexico's lead in adopting the precautionary principle in relation to the use of pesticides and GMOs.

Sincerely,

Council of Canadians

Canadian Biotechnology Action Network

Trade Justice Network of the Northumberland Chapter of the Council of Canadians

Northumberland Coalition for Social Justice