

# PLANTING Seeds of Doubt

BY NADÈGE ADAM

On March 12, The Council of Canadians completed an 11-city “Planting Seeds of Doubt” tour throughout the three Prairie provinces. We met with wheat farmers and activists to discuss the need to take a stand against the introduction of genetically engineered wheat in Canada.

This tour marked an important shift in The Council of Canadians’ campaign against genetic engineering because, for the first time, we have engaged with farmers alongside consumers in the fight to protect the integrity of our food supply. Although many farmers are still open to the idea of genetic engineering, they have heard the concerns of their customers and, unlike our government, they are listening.

Introducing genetically engineered wheat in Canada would create havoc in our wheat industry. There is a general consensus among researchers and agronomists about the high risk of contamination of non-GE wheat through the spread of the GE wheat gene. This is significant because many of our major international wheat buyers, such as Warburton and Grandi Molini Italiani, have stated that they would not only abstain from buying GE wheat, they would avoid buying any wheat from countries where GE wheat is grown due to this risk. The Canadian Wheat Board has reported that the introduction of GE wheat in Canada would cause a significant loss of sales in our wheat export markets.

The impact would also be severe for organic farmers whose livelihood depends on their ability to preserve their crops from unnatural processes such as genetic engineering. Organic farmers have already had to suffer the loss of organic canola because of the spread of the genetically engineered canola gene. Contamination

is such a grave threat to their crops that many of them have joined together in a class action lawsuit against Monsanto to prevent the introduction of that corporation’s variety of genetically engineered wheat.

Though Canadians and the rest of our world community have made their concerns about GE wheat very clear, corporations like Monsanto remain undeterred in their plans to engineer our wheat and, by extension, our bread. Compounding this problem is the fact that our government refuses to commit to prohibiting the introduction of GE wheat. We have learned that certain governmental agencies have gone as far as issuing a gag order on their agronomists, forbidding them to speak critically about GE wheat in public. It is also important to note that our government has never turned down an application for the approval of a genetically engineered crop.

While the odds are against us, there is good reason for hope.

Canadian farmers and activists are not alone in their battle against

GE wheat. In the United States, a similar rural and urban resistance movement is growing and The Council of Canadians has developed strong cross-border alliances with it. Some U.S. activists even joined with us as panelists on the “Planting Seeds of Doubt” tour.

In rural communities across the Prairies, farmers are lobbying to have towns and cities pass municipal resolutions calling on the federal government to prohibit the introduction of genetically engineered wheat in Canada. In the coming months, The Council of Canadians will mobilize consumers and organize days of action in cities across Canada to protect bread from genetic engineering.

To date, our government has chosen to ignore the strongly held concerns of consumers. What remains to be seen is whether they will choose to ignore the united urban and rural front of consumers and farmers.

*Nadège Adam is the Biotechnology Campaigner for The Council of Canadians.* ✿

IN BOOKSTORES NOW

## Secret Ingredients: The Brave New World of Industrial Farming

By Stuart Laidlaw

Chicken, corn, potatoes, a slice of bread, and a glass of milk. Where does a meal like this come from? Who and what is involved in getting it to your table? Today, once independent farmers work on contract for huge food corporations, growing genetically modified food in soil saturated with chemicals. Farming is big business and has become a matter of world trade regulations that favour global corporations. Stuart Laidlaw uncovers many shocking practices, from pesticide use so severe it causes massive fish kills in PEI rivers to the transformation of small prairie abattoirs into vast, industrial slaughterhouses dependent on minimum-wage immigrant workers.

