

HOW TO MAKE YOUR COM

Canadians are joining regions, communities and countries around the world to declare their communities GE-Free Zones. Launched in June 2005, the GE-Free Canada campaign is a nationwide, grassroots effort by farmers, environmentalists, and Canadian citizens concerned with issues of food safety and food sovereignty.



Illustration: Natacha Geers

Community by community, citizens are banding together to create a web of zones across Canada that are free of genetically engineered (GE) plants, animals, crops and trees. The campaign's goal is to have 50 communities in Canada declare themselves GE-Free in the next two years.

The GE-Free movement has already gathered incredible momentum in Canada. Salt Spring Island, B.C., and Powell River, B.C., passed municipal resolutions declaring themselves GE-Free Crop Areas. Prince Edward Island is currently holding legislative committee hearings to decide whether to make the province GE-Free. Numerous communities across the prairies have passed municipal resolutions banning GE wheat.

Communities in Europe, Asia and the United States are fighting GE products at local and national levels. Over 100 regions of Europe and 3,400 local au-

thorities around the world have told biotech companies that their genetically engineered crops are not welcome.

WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT GE FOODS?

GE foods have been in our grocery stores since 1996. Today, 7 out of 10 processed foods in our grocery cart contain GE ingredients. Experiments were conducted on our food supply without our consent or knowledge. To date, there have been no studies assessing the long-term effects of GE foods on either human or environmental health. Scientists fear that inserting foreign genes into food could create new toxins or allergens. We do not know what happens when these newly created organisms are introduced into an ecosystem or what happens to the people who consume them.

Top Canadian scientists have heavily criticized Canada's GE safety assessment program. In a 2001 report by the Royal Society of Canada titled *Elements of Precaution: Recommendations for the Regulation of Food Biotechnology in Canada*, they provided Ottawa with 53 recommendations calling for an overhaul of the current regulatory framework for the approval and release of GE foods (see www.rsc.ca for more information). These recommendations have not been implemented.

CASE STUDY: PERCY SCHMEISER

Saskatchewan farmer Percy Schmeiser has come face to face with the devastating effect of GE crop contamination. After a neighbour's Round-up Ready canola seeds blew into his field, Monsanto sued him for copyright infringement. He took the case to the Supreme Court, which upheld his conviction in 2004. Even though Schmeiser never purchased or intentionally planted GE canola, the mere presence of the patented seed in his field constituted an infringement of Monsanto's intellectual property rights. For more information, check out www.percyschmeiser.com.

MUNITY A GE-FREE ZONE

Genetically modified seeds are hard to control. A gust of wind can contaminate a farmer's field with unwanted GE seeds. Farmers victimized by GE contamination can be sued and lose their entire harvest. This leaves Canadian farmers at the mercy of corporations eager to protect their intellectual property rights. Until all of these environmental and human health concerns have been addressed, we need to put a moratorium on any further cultivation of GE foods in our community.

SUPPORT LOCAL FARMERS

It is hard for farmers to make a living in Canada. Many farmers take off-farm jobs just to make ends meet. Most organic farmers produce healthy, organic food as cheaply as they can. Here are some ways that you can support them:

- Purchase locally produced food from grocery stores and farmers' markets.
- Tell your grocery store manager that you want local meats, dairy, produce and packaged foods to be made available.
- Consider starting a local "buying club," or joining a community-supported agriculture program, to make organic, GE-free food as affordable as possible.
- Go to www.eatwellguide.org for a list of organic producers in your community.

HOW IS GE DIFFERENT FROM TRADITIONAL PLANT BREEDING?

While plants have been cross-bred for centuries, it is only recently that scientists have begun to break through the plant-animal barrier. It is the insertion of non-plant genes or bacteria into plants in the laboratory that distinguishes genetic engineering from traditional practices. The science is new and the methods are far from precise.

The result is that these genetically engineered plants, grown commercially across Canada, have changed the agricultural landscape of the country. While they may still look like traditional varieties, such as corn, soy or canola plants, their manipulated genetic characteristics are beginning to interact with the natural environment around them, producing super-weeds and sterility in plants.

BUT ISN'T GE THE ANSWER TO WORLD HUNGER?

Hunger is due to poverty and lack of access to food, not shortages in production. The world produces enough food to feed everyone. We need political will to solve hunger, not GE foods.

For more information on the Council of Canadians' GE-Free Canada campaign, including talking points and key statistics, check out our website, www.canadians.org, and click on "GE-Free Canada," or call 1-800-387-7177.

Tara Scurr is The Council of Canadians' BC-Yukon Regional Organizer.

MAKE YOUR COMMUNITY A GE-FREE ZONE



- Gather a coalition of concerned farmers and residents.
- Survey your city/town council to identify your potential allies and opponents.
- Draft a resolution asking city council to declare your community a GE-Free Zone or GE-Free Crop Area.
- Ask to speak before the next city council meeting and present your community-backed resolution.
- Invite the media to cover the issue. If a resolution is passed successfully, don't forget to hold a press conference to announce your victory!
- Notify the Council of Canadians' national office.