

INTEGRATION BY CONTAMINATION

GENETICALLY ENGINEERED CROPS ARE SPREADING FAST ACROSS NORTH AMERICA

by Lucy Sharratt

Deep integration is a term that describes the dismantling of the border between Canada and the United States. But genetically engineered (GE) plants already ignore this border. GE crops just keep on growing – and contaminating farmers' fields and wild areas.

Even if the federal government were to stop approving new GE crops, genetic pollution from GE canola has already driven Saskatchewan organic canola farmers to sue multinational companies Monsanto and Bayer. Meanwhile, there are test plots of GE poplar and white spruce trees in Quebec. This is worrisome, because tree pollen can travel for over 1,000 miles. In the United States, over 400 GE tree trials are currently under way, involving 20 different species. That's a lot of potential for contamination.

In August 2006 alone, two cases of contamination were discovered in the U.S. Even though U.S. field tests of Bayer's unapproved GE rice were stopped in 2001, the rice was recently found contaminating U.S. commercial supplies of long-grain rice and is now being found in shipments and food products across the world. And in one particularly dangerous and absurd case of "I told you so," it was found that GE "creeping bent grass" – originally designed for and intended to be confined to golf courses – had escaped into the wild. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency currently allows test plots of this grass in Ontario.

But hasn't GE helped farmers? The National Farmers Union says "no." It's been 10 years since the introduction of the first GE crop, and Canadian farmers



Percy Schmeiser, Vandana Shiva and Colleen Ross, speaking out against Terminator seeds in March 2006.

are suffering the worst income crisis in the history of modern agriculture. The promise that genetic engineering would increase yields and decrease pesticide use has proven to be hollow. Instead, crop prices are at an all-time low and farmers have lost export markets due to contamination and global consumer rejection of GE.

The Canadian government has never believed in democratic debate over the introduction of GE crops and foods. And the harmonization of food regulations due to deep integration with the U.S. will only make democratic processes and rigorous regulation even less attainable.

A TERMINATOR VICTORY

Despite this growing threat, we celebrated a major victory this spring. Canadians stopped the federal government from overturning the United Nations' moratorium on "Terminator seeds" – seeds genetically engineered to be sterile after first harvest so farmers cannot save and reuse them. Canadians sent 78,000 postcards and thousands of letters to the Prime Minister. Even though the Canadian government had tried to end

the global moratorium on Terminator seeds, the members of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity disagreed, and instead voted to preserve and strengthen the moratorium on this dangerous technology.

Still, there is a lot of work to be done to ensure that corporations and governments don't try to introduce Terminator technology again. Monsanto just bought the U.S. company Delta & Pine Land, developer of Terminator seeds. We now know that nothing short of a permanent ban on Terminator technology both globally and nationally will stop Monsanto.

For more information on the Ban Terminator campaign, check out www.banterminator.org/p/282.

Lucy Sharratt is the Coordinator of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network.

NEW NETWORK TAKES ON GE FIGHT

A new national network is poised to lead the fight against genetic engineering in Canada. The recently formed Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN) builds on a collaboration that began in 1999 when 23 environmental, social justice and consumer groups met in Ottawa under the name Gene Allies. This informal group of organizations worked together to prevent the introduction of bovine growth hormone in Canadian milk and to pressure Monsanto to abandon GE wheat.

CBAN is coordinating the Ban Terminator campaign, and is building capacity to take on other issues and become a resource on GE issues for all Canadians. Now in its beginning stages, CBAN will monitor new technologies and applications for product approval, while also keeping an eye on government regulations and corporate spin.

To find out more about CBAN, visit www.cban.ca.