

Survey Shows Many Farmers Hurt by GMO Contamination

Food & Water Watch

WASHINGTON — This week, as the USDA wraps up its comment period on the feasibility of genetically engineered, GMO and non-GMO crops to coexist, Food & Water Watch — in partnership with the Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship Marketing — has released survey results that clearly show contamination from GMO crops is happening, and it's non-GMO farmers who are paying the price.

The survey of farmers across 17 states, primarily in the Midwest, is an effort to fill the data gap that was used to justify an inadequate policy recommendation by the USDA Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture, or AC21.

Heavily weighted with biotech proponents, the committee gathered for a series of meetings in 2011 and 2012 to establish a protocol for coexistence and to design a compensation mechanism for farmers who are economically harmed by contamination from GMO crops.

Unfortunately, the committee was unable to estimate the costs associated with GMO presence on non-GMO and organic farms due to a lack of data. Its final suggestion for a compensation mechanism was a form of crop insurance that included, in one proposal, a premium to be paid by producers of non-GMO crops.

"If USDA really wanted to know if contamination was happening, all they had to do was ask organic grain producers who take great pains to keep their crops from being contaminated," said Wenonah Hauter, executive director of Food & Water Watch. "Now USDA can no longer claim ignorance about this problem."

The survey results reveal that the risks and the effects of GMO contamination have unfairly burdened organic and non-GMO farmers with extra work, longer hours and financial insecurity, which has led to a general skepticism of coexistence amongst the

organic community.

Some even expressed the feeling that their chosen method of production is being seriously threatened. Meanwhile, GMO growers are not specifically required to mitigate the risk of contamination.

Many of the producers who responded to the survey use the marketing assistance services of the OFARM member co-ops.

"To try to avoid contamination, our member producers follow the expensive requirements of the USDA organic standards and take additional measures designed by OFARM," said Oren Holle, a diversified organic grain and livestock farmer from Bremen, Kan., and the president of OFARM.

"But far too frequently, they still have to deal with costly rejections due to GMO contamination," Holle said.

Survey highlights include:

- Nearly half of respondents are skeptical that GMO and non-GMO crop production can coexist.

- More than two-thirds think good stewardship alone is not enough to protect organic and non-GMO farmers from contamination.

- Five out of six responding farmers are concerned about GMO contamination affecting their farms, with 60 percent saying they are extremely concerned.

- One out of three responding farmers have dealt with GMO contamination on their farms. Of those contaminated farmers, more than half have been rejected by their buyers for that reason. They reported a median cost of a rejected truckload (approximately 1,000 bushels) of \$4,500.

- Nearly half of responding farmers would not choose to purchase crop insurance to cover losses associated with GMO contamination. And of those who would purchase insurance, three out of four reported that GMO patent holders, GMO users or both of those entities should bear the liability burden for any economic loss associated with GMO contamination.

"The USDA's focus on coexistence and crop insurance is misplaced," Hauter said. "The department must recognize the harm that is already being done to organic and non-GMO farmers and put the responsibility squarely where it belongs — with the biotech companies."

Who Is Making Our Farming Choices?

Editor:

Many farmers in Maryland and across the country are using genetically modified organisms — also known as GMOs.

Most of the corn and soybeans, growth hormones and vaccines sold by Monsanto, Elanco, Syngenta, Dow, Dupont, Bayer and BASF are produced with gene-altering biotechnology.

Biotechnology creates life forms that would never occur in nature because genes from one species are being transferred into a totally different species.

In addition, these new life forms are patented so farmers cannot legally save and reproduce them.

In the mid-1990s, the promise from the biotech companies was that these novel products would help cows produce more milk, control or eliminate weeds, repel insects and diseases, and create heat and drought tolerance.

Supposedly, farmers would make more money, our yields would go up, our pesticide use

would go down, and we would be on our way to ending world hunger.

So how do these promises stack up after 20 years?

Most farmers I know are not feeling any richer. On the other hand, the biotech companies are doing so well that they bought up most of the small regional seed companies.

Genetically engineered seeds are more expensive, and now it is hard to even find locally adapted non-GMO seeds.

Interestingly, some Midwest farmers are returning to older corn varieties because they feel they are losing yield and profits with the biotech seeds.

Dairy farmers found cows treated with rBST hormone got more udder infections. Most dairies have abandoned rBST, and

consumers welcomed that change.

We ignored the predictions from some university weed scientists, and our fields are now plagued with about two dozen superweeds that can't be killed by Roundup. Nature's weeds began to outsmart biotech in a mere half a dozen years.

Now, the biotech companies are trying to license new seed that resists stronger herbicides, such as 2,4-D.

Pesticide use has not gone down. And insects? They are attacking the Bt crops that are supposed to repel them. Drought and heat resistance? Well, they are still working on that one. And world hunger? Don't ask.

If biotech were a "silver bullet," we would know it by now. Instead, consumers across the nation are demanding GMO labeling laws. They want to know what they are eating. They want a choice. Just as farmers want a choice to buy non-GMO seeds and vaccines.

Our rights as farmers and consumers to know and choose is in danger of being lost.

Federal Judge Jeffrey White warned in a recent case involving Roundup Ready sugar beets that genetic engineering could mean the "potential elimination of farmer's choice to grow nongenetically engineered crops, or a consumer's choice to eat nongenetically engineered food."

Who is making the choice of how you farm or what you eat? If you want the right to choose, support bills HB1191/SB0778 now in the Maryland legislature that would require GMO labeling for produce and most packaged food.

Once consumers know what they're eating, their choices will expand and so will ours. Get involved, go to NeedToKnow-Maryland.org.

— Nick Maravell
Md. farmer member
National Organic Standards Board



Commentary/
Opinion



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CO From Gas Heat, Appliances Can Be Deadly

Editor:

Since we are LDS — members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — and three of our sons have served two-year, full-time missions, the following story instantly made the tears flow.

A brother and sister on full-time missions temporarily returned home when their entire family — mother, father and two brothers — were killed by carbon

monoxide poisoning.

As I said in my letter to the editor last month, gas is *not* "safe, natural." Fracking can be dangerous, but so can gas itself.

If you are stuck in a gas-heated home or have gas appliances, *please* get several CO detectors. It could save your life and the lives of those you love.

— Debbie Murphy
Unionville, Pa.

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Editor:

I was shocked and very disappointed to see a tobacco product ad in *Lancaster Farming*. Such ads do not belong in a paper as reputed as yours.

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fore I discontinue my subscription.

I have always considered your paper as a clean farm paper. What next, cigarettes, drugs, etc.?

— Ben K. Petersheim
Airville, Pa.

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