

# WORC

*Western Organization of Resource Councils*

## **Remarks of Helen Waller**

**Media Briefing – Genetically Modified Crops  
Farm Aid Concert, White River Amphitheatre  
Seattle, Washington  
September 18, 2004**

I am Helen Waller. I farm with my husband, Gordy, and my family near Circle, Montana. I'm a past Chair of the Northern Plains Resource Council and of the National Family Farm Coalition. I'm here today for Northern Plains, a Montana group which organizes Montana citizens to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life. Northern Plains is part of the Western Organization of Resource Councils, or WORC, a regional network of seven grassroots community organizations that has 8,750 members and 50 local chapters.

I'm here because family farmers and consumers want a time-out on genetically modified crops. The biotech industry needs to slow down, and policy makers need to catch up. Our legislatures need to ensure that decisions about genetically modified crops are in the public interest.

The government needs to do independent testing of the safety of GM crops, and put policies in place to protect farmers and consumers.

We – family farmers working with Northern Plains, WORC, and DRC -- won a time-out from Monsanto on genetically modified wheat. I want to thank Willie Nelson and everyone at Farm Aid, who have supported our fight and the right of farmers and consumers to keep biotech crops and biotech companies off our farms and off our dinner plates.

Here's our story.

Monsanto planned to introduce a genetically modified variety of hard red spring wheat, called Roundup Ready. Our overseas customers, especially in Asia and Europe, do not want it. They told us they would stop buying *any* of our wheat if any was grown here.

Why would they do this? Because they are not convinced genetically modified crops are safe, and there is no benefit to consumers from Roundup Ready wheat. Once it's planted on a large scale, there is no way to keep GM crops separate from conventional crops. Consumers overseas want GM-free bread and pasta, so if we grow GM wheat, our customers – the bakers, millers and grain dealers -- will buy wheat from Australia, Ukraine, or somewhere else.

WORC commissioned a study, by Iowa State University economist Robert Wisner, of the economic impact of this problem. He found it would cut our exports at least in half, lower prices by at least one-third.

U.S. laws and public policies don't deal with these new crops or these kinds of problems. So we went to work. We organized, we held town meetings, we went to our state legislatures, we went to Washington.

We surprised Monsanto. They didn't think farmers were paying attention to our customers, or that we would stand up and say enough is enough. But the customer is King, and that's what we kept saying, until we won.

Just this last May, Monsanto said it was putting its plans for GM wheat on the shelf.

That's good news for us. GM wheat would be a commercial disaster. Monsanto's announcement was a victory for farmers in the US and Canada. After five years of effort, we have finally convinced Monsanto to face the reality that our markets do not want Roundup Ready wheat.

It's good news for consumers overseas and here in the U.S. You know the wheat and bread and pasta you buy will be free of GM wheat – for a while.

Monsanto made the right decision, but it shouldn't have been up to Monsanto alone. We need laws to put responsibility for contaminated crops on the biotech companies that own these seeds with their manipulated genes. One contaminated farm is one too many. If their GM crops ruin my markets, they should pay. The way things are now, the liability is all on farmers.

U.S. consumers need labeling. Our customers overseas are king because they have labels on their food that let them choose whether to buy GM food or not. Consumers here in the U.S. don't have that option.

Consumers who are concerned should ask their grocery stores and bakeries wherever they buy wheat products to pledge not to use GM wheat. Farmers and consumers who want to know more should go to our website, [www.worc.org](http://www.worc.org).