



"Watchdogs of the Prairie"  
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**LAWSUIT CALLS GENETICALLY ENGINEERED ALFALFA  
A RISK TO FARMERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT**  
*Dakota Resource Council joins groups challenging USDA Approval of First  
Perennial Gene-Altered Crop*

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**Dickinson, ND** – Barely a month after a report cited problems with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) oversight of genetically engineered (GE) crops, a coalition of farmers, farm groups, consumers and environmentalists filed a lawsuit today calling the department's approval of GE alfalfa a threat to farmers' livelihoods and a risk to the environment.

The suit contends the USDA improperly allowed the commercial release of GE alfalfa, the first commercial release of a GE perennial crop, and failed to analyze the public health, environmental, and economic consequences of the release.

The suit also asserts that the GE alfalfa will likely contaminate natural alfalfa and ultimately prevent farmers from producing natural, non-GE alfalfa for markets that demand it.

"As a producer of organic alfalfa seed and hay, there is absolutely no way I will be able to protect my crop from contamination," said Blaine Schmaltz, Rugby, owner of Blaine's Best Seeds. "I market my organic seed and hay to organic dairies and livestock growers. Currently I do not test my alfalfa, but with the introduction of GE alfalfa, these products will have to be tested at both ends, adding barriers and expense."

The suit cites the concerns of farmers with export markets. Buyers in Japan and South Korea, America's major alfalfa export customers, have strongly stated that concerns about genetic contamination will lead them to avoid U.S. alfalfa if a GE variety is grown in this country, according to the suit. U.S. alfalfa exports total nearly \$480 million per year, with about 75 percent of exports going to Japan.

Adds Schmaltz, "I also export seeds for organic sprouting under strict, no-GE regulations. That business may cease."

In addition to genetic contamination, the lawsuit says GE alfalfa poses unique risks to the environment. The GE alfalfa is designed to tolerate high doses of glyphosate, the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup herbicide. In crops like corn and soybeans, Roundup Ready varieties are marketed as a way to replace other toxic chemicals with glyphosate. But 83 percent of U.S. alfalfa is grown without any herbicides, and many experts note that GE alfalfa could lead to massive increases in herbicide use on alfalfa, more chemical pollution in the environment and build weed resistance to glyphosate.

Joining CFS in the suit are Sierra Club, Western Organization of Resource Councils, National Family Farm Coalition, Beyond Pesticides, Cornucopia Institute, Dakota Resource Council, and two individual alfalfa seed producers.

In a report critical of USDA's oversight of GE crops released in late December, the USDA's inspector general said, "Current (USDA) regulations, policies and procedures do not go far enough to ensure the safe introduction of agricultural biotechnology."

The suit says organic farmers could lose their livelihoods when organic alfalfa is contaminated by the GE variety. In its environmental assessment, USDA acknowledges that bees can pollinate alfalfa two miles away, but states that organic growers should manage the problem with buffer zones.

"What concerns me about the questionable release of yet-another GE crop--this time, GE alfalfa--is its potential to limit my choice as a consumer," said Dean Hulse, Fargo. "One of the reasons I choose organic foods is to make a statement. As a consumer, I vote with my purchasing power, and I'm telling the market that I want organic foods on grocery store shelves."

Alfalfa is grown on over 21 million acres, and is worth \$8 billion per year (not including the value of final products, such as dairy products), making it the country's third most valuable and fourth most widely grown crop.

The lawsuit filed in federal court in the Northern District of California calls on the court to rescind the deregulated status of Monsanto's Roundup Ready alfalfa, calling USDA's decision to approve the crop arbitrary and capricious. The lawsuit also challenges USDA for its inadequate environmental review of the crop and calls for a full environmental impact statement. The complaint can be found at [www.centerforfoodsafety.org/pubs/ComplaintAlfalfa2.15.2006.pdf](http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/pubs/ComplaintAlfalfa2.15.2006.pdf).