

Farmers Push for Economic Analysis of Genetically Modified Wheat Introduction

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 11, 2003

Billings - Groups representing wheat farmers from across the country are asking the federal Animal Plant Health Inspection Service to take a hard economic look at genetically modified wheat before the agency clears the way for its commercial introduction.

In a petition submitted to APHIS today, the Dakota Resource Council, Northern Plains Resource Council, Family Farm Coalition, Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture, and the region-wide Western Organization of Resource Councils asked APHIS to prepare a full EIS focused on the economic impacts of its introduction, as opposed to the typical "environmental assessment."

"I'm as interested in technological innovation as any farmer, but I also need to protect the value of my crop," said Tom Wiley, a North Dakota wheat farmer, speaking on behalf of WORC. "We need an economic impact statement so that we can make sure we're not stepping over dollars to get dimes. Simplified weed control isn't worth losing our valuable export markets."

Deregulation of Roundup Ready wheat by the federal Animal Plant Health Inspection Service is the only barrier to the commercial introduction of Monsanto's genetically modified hard red spring wheat. The majority of U.S. hard red spring wheat is exported to countries whose buyers have said they will not buy genetically modified wheat.

Shipping and storage systems are not currently equipped to keep genetically modified grains separate from other varieties. Wheat farmers fear that the commercial introduction of genetically modified wheat could result in economic hardship for all American wheat farmers.

A report prepared by grain-outlook specialist Dr. Robert Wisner, University Professor of Economics at Iowa State University, backs up farmers' fears. According to Wisner's report, the price of hard spring wheat could drop by about one-third if a genetically modified variety is introduced commercially into Montana or North Dakota in the next two to six years.

"Every available indicator of foreign consumer demand points to a high risk of GM wheat rejection in export markets," said Dr. Wisner.

Monsanto, a multinational biotechnology company, has publicly announced plans to introduce genetically modified wheat into Montana, North Dakota and other states by 2005, and has applied to USDA to deregulate its "Roundup Ready" wheat, which is genetically engineered to resist the herbicide Roundup. Once the genetically modified wheat is deregulated, Monsanto will be free to grow and sell the wheat throughout the United States.