

## **Farmers Want Liability Protection and Independent Research on Genetically Modified Crops**

### **Farm Aid Focuses on Genetically Modified Crops**

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**AUBURN, WASH.** – Two farmers from the Northern Plains called today for a time-out on introduction of genetically modified (GM) crops.

In remarks prepared for a presentation at Farm Aid, Helen Waller, a wheat farmer near Circle, Mont., and spokesperson for the Northern Plains Resource Council and WORC (Western Organization of Resource Councils), said a time-out was necessary because U.S. food policy has not kept pace with the environmental, legal, and economic developments arising from these crops.

“The biotech industry needs to slow down, and policymakers need to catch up,” she said. “Policymakers should ensure that decisions about GM crops are in the public interest.”

Farmers are concerned about liability for contamination by GM crops and by the lack of independent safety testing, Waller said.

“We need laws to put responsibility for contaminated crops on the biotech companies that own genetically engineered seeds,” Waller said. “One contaminated farm is one too many.”

Waller urged state legislatures to address liability concerns in 2005.

Farmers stand to lose because foreign buyers are not interested in buying U.S. wheat if GM wheat is introduced, according to Wayne Fisher, a wheat farmer from Dickinson, N.D., and spokesperson for the Dakota Resource Council and WORC.

Fisher called for rigorous federal research into the economic, environmental, and food safety issues associated with GM crops. He cited a recent report from the National Academy of Sciences that revealed holes in regulation and safety testing of GM foods.

“The report said there is no independent safety testing done on these crops before they are put on the market,” Fisher said. “The result is we have almost no science to tell us if GM crops are safe or not. Many consumers are concerned that they are serving as guinea pigs.

“We need labeling so consumers know what’s in their food,” he said. “We need mandatory, independent testing of the safety of GM food before it is put on the market. The Food and Drug Administration needs authority to reject a GM crop if its safety is not demonstrated. And we need comprehensive studies to monitor possible long-term health effects of GM foods once they are approved – known as “post-market” testing.”

Both Waller and Fisher have been active in efforts questioning the commercial introduction of GM wheat by the Monsanto Co. The company had planned to introduce commercial GM wheat as early as 2005.

Pressure by farmers and wheat buyers, led by WORC, Northern Plains, and Dakota Resource Council, forced Monsanto to postpone its plan indefinitely.

A study by Iowa State University economist Robert Wisner found introduction of genetically modified wheat would cut U.S. exports in half at least and lower prices by one-third or more.

Farm Aid began when Willie Nelson, Neil Young, and John Mellencamp organized the first Farm Aid concert in 1985. Since then, Farm Aid has raised \$26 million to promote a strong and resilient family farm system of agriculture.

Farm Aid launched its new guide, “10 Ways to Ensure Healthy Food for You and Your Family,” at the benefit. The guide offers tips to help people choose food produced by family farmers. Farm Aid and local family farm groups hosted a “10 Ways in 10 Days” series of events at Pike Place Market in Seattle in the 10 days leading up to the concert.

For the first time in its history, Farm Aid held the benefit concert on the West Coast, at the White River Amphitheatre on the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation in Auburn, Wash., outside Seattle.