

# W O R C

*Western Organization of Resource Councils*

## **Remarks of Wayne Fisher**

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

I am Wayne Fisher. I'm a farmer from North Dakota, whose only crop is Hard Red Spring Wheat. It is not genetically modified, and farmers like me want to keep the option of staying GM-free.

If genetically engineered wheat is introduced in the U.S., this option will no longer be available. It can't be kept separate from conventional, GM-free wheat – it's too easily contaminated by pollen in the field, or by mixing in the transportation system.

I'm here as a member of the Dakota Resource Council, part of the Western Organization of Resource Councils, organizations of farmers, ranchers and consumers concerned about issues such as genetically modified crops. And I'm here to remind people that victory is possible. Monsanto, the world's largest seller of genetically modified seeds, recently agreed to shelve it's genetically modified wheat. Strong opposition to GM wheat from customers overseas and here at home, and the opposition from farmers, which we led, forced Monsanto to postpone its plans to sell GM wheat seeds. We are here to say it is possible to win. With time and patience, you can be the ultimate victor in decisions about how you farm or what you eat. Don't give up hope.

What's the problem with genetically modified foods? As a farmer, I'm concerned because our customers overseas don't want it. Food safety is their main concern. They don't trust our safety testing. The corporations which sell genetically modified seeds say they are found to be safe by the Food and Drug Administration – but this is not true. The FDA is a paper tiger.

A recent report from the National Academy of Sciences revealed gaping holes in the regulation and safety testing of genetically engineered (GE) foods. There is no independent safety testing done on these crops before they are put on the market. There is no testing by the FDA. FDA does not make a finding that new GM crops are safe. FDA only reviews information submitted by biotech corporations, and it only does that if a corporation voluntarily submits its own test results to FDA.

The result is that 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 in safety tests for genetically modified foods. Right here in Seattle, the School Board recently passed a policy requiring their 100 public schools to provide non-GMO, non-irradiated food to their students when that is possible and cost-effective.

Our customers overseas, and more and more consumers in the U.S., want to know why biotech companies resist independent testing of their products. If the corporations promoting genetically modified foods are so sure of their safety, why do they resist accepting liability? Today's legal system shifts most liability to farmers, grain elevators and others. If biotech companies are so sure these foods are safe to eat, then why do they resist labeling of genetically modified foods in the grocery store? We label our foods for all kinds of nutritional content – why not whether the food is genetically modified?

We need labeling so consumers know what's in their food. We need mandatory, independent testing of the safety of GM food before it is put on the market. FDA needs authority to reject a genetically modified 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.

If GM wheat is grown here, our biggest customers have said they won't buy any U.S. wheat, because we couldn't guarantee it wouldn't be contaminated. More than one billion bushels of wheat – half of our crop – is sold overseas. Dr. Robert Wisner of Iowa State University, in a report commissioned by WORC, said we would lose one-third of our exports if genetically modified wheat is grown in the U.S., resulting in a one-third drop in crop prices. That would put me out of business, and ruin a lot of other rural businesses that depend on my business – unless the difference is made up by taxpayers, who would be subsidizing Monsanto for ruining our wheat markets.

Our foreign customers would turn to other countries to get non-GM wheat, as many have for corn and soybeans. One result of the introduction of GM crops in the U.S. is the outsourcing of non-GM crop production to countries like Canada and Australia. If GM wheat is grown in the U.S., they will capture our markets by delivering what our customers want.

I'd like to thank Willie Nelson and everyone at Farm Aid for their support for our efforts to keep your bread and pasta free of genetically modified wheat. Groups like WORC and the Dakota Resource Council greatly appreciate support from farmers and consumers to continue this struggle. If you can help or you'd just like to know more, please go to our website, [www.worc.org](http://www.worc.org).