

DAKOTA RESOURCE COUNCIL

P. O. Box 1095, Dickinson ND 58602-1095
(701) 483-2851; www.drcinfo.com

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DRC: VILSACK ALFALFA DECISION THREATENS GROWERS AND CONSUMERS

Dakota Resource Council (DRC) said the recent decision to allow unrestricted planting of genetically modified Roundup Ready alfalfa threatens consumer choice and the livelihoods of organic and conventional growers.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the decision Thursday, January 27.

“The decision to allow the planting of Roundup Ready alfalfa will destroy the livelihoods of tens of thousands of family farmers, from alfalfa hay producers to organic dairies and others,” said Todd Leake, farmer from Emerado, N.D., and DRC member. “The Secretary of Agriculture has apparently decided to bring to an end to a growing sector of American agriculture and take away the living of hard working farmers and their families.”

Leake said the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) had ignored the damage contamination causes to conventional and organic producers and the narrowing of choices for consumers until DRC and others sued in 2007. The court ruled USDA’s approval of GM alfalfa violated environmental laws by failing to look at the risks of contamination of conventional and organic alfalfa, weed resistance, and greater use of glyphosate herbicide, sold as Roundup by Monsanto. The court banned new plantings of GM alfalfa until USDA completed a more comprehensive assessment of these impacts. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals twice affirmed the ban. In June 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the ban on Roundup Ready alfalfa until and unless future deregulation occurs.

“USDA acknowledged these problems in its final environmental study but still has done nothing to address the problems,” Leake said. “USDA and the Administration have sided with Monsanto against conventional and organic producers and consumers, even as they pay lip service to the importance of the organic and local food movements.”

Vilsack’s decision could jeopardize sales of conventional alfalfa to some foreign countries if the crop is contaminated with genetically modified material, Leake said.

About 20 million acres of alfalfa are grown in the United States. Alfalfa is the fourth largest crop after corn, soybeans and wheat.

DRC was formed in 1978 to protect North Dakota's land, air, water, rural communities and agricultural economy.