

DRC & WORC Join Challenge to Roundup Ready Alfalfa

DICKINSON—Dakota Resource Council (DRC) and the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) have joined a lawsuit filed March 18 challenging the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) decision to allow unrestricted planting of genetically modified Roundup Ready (GM) alfalfa. The groups said the agency has failed to provide adequate oversight of GM alfalfa.

“USDA's decision to approve genetically modified alfalfa puts corporate interests ahead of those of farmers and consumers,” said Todd Leake, Emerado, a farmer and DRC leader.

“GM alfalfa will contaminate non-GM alfalfa crops, threaten the livelihoods of farmers and contaminate limit consumers' food choices,” Leake added.

“USDA has acknowledged these problems, but has done nothing to fix them,” he said.

One seed producer who has already abandoned alfalfa because of the threat of contamination is Blaine Schmaltz of Blaine's Best Seeds, Rugby, who markets to organic growers.

He said he quit raising alfalfa seed because he thought contamination was likely and couldn't afford to be stuck with inventory he could not sell.

Scientists in Canada found that genetically modified alfalfa outcrossings occurred at a 22% level in seed production fields and a 15% level at hay production fields at a distance of one kilometer. They also found that genetically modified alfalfa outcrossings to feral alfalfa took place at a 92% level at 230 meters.

In a survey article, Canadian plant scientists Rene C. Van Acker and Muthkumar V. Bagavathiannan concluded that “the complete confinement of GM [alfalfa] traits” would be “very difficult and once a given GM trait escapes into the environment, retraction of the trait will be unlikely.”

About 20 million acres of alfalfa are grown in the United States. Alfalfa is the fourth largest crop after corn, soybeans and wheat. According to USDA data, 93 percent of alfalfa is grown without use of herbicides. USDA estimates that full deregulation of GM alfalfa would add up to 23 million more pounds of toxic herbicides annually into the environment.

Attorneys for the Center for Food Safety (CFS) and Earthjustice filed the lawsuit in federal court on behalf of a coalition of organic farmers, dairies and agricultural associations, and environmental and consumer groups: CFS, Beyond Pesticides, Cornucopia Institute, California Farmers Union, DRC,

Geertson See Farms, National Family Farm Coalition, Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, Sierra Club, Trask Family Seeds, and WORC.

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

Attached electronically:

1. "The Feral Nature of Alfalfa and Implications for The Co-Existence of Genetically Modified (GM) and Non-GM Alfalfa" by Muthukumar V. Bagavathiannan and Rene C. Van Acker.
2. The complaint as filed.