

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 5, 2010

Alfalfa study not worth a straw **USDA receives more than 200,000 comments critical of EIS**

Billings, Mont. – Two groups representing farmers, ranchers and consumers have urged the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to redo its study on the deregulation of Monsanto's genetically modified (GM) alfalfa.

In comments submitted to the agency Wednesday, the Dakota Resource Council (DRC) and Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) said the draft Environmental Impact Statement on GM alfalfa was inadequate and failed to give a "true picture of the economic or environmental impacts" of commercializing the crop.

"USDA should start over and truly evaluate the contamination of non-GM alfalfa and the potential affects on seed growers, organic and natural meat producers, dairy producers, and conventional and organic honey producers," said Todd Leake, a farmer with DRC and WORC.

USDA has recommended approval of Monsanto's GM alfalfa in the study.

"This decision would adversely affect a lot of agriculture," Leake said. "Deregulation would destroy producers who have carved a niche in the organic dairy and beef markets. Monsanto wants to own the rights to alfalfa, the fourth largest crop in the country, and sell lots of Roundup to spray on those fields."

Leake is a conventional farmer from Emerado, N.D., and grows alfalfa primarily as a soil nutrient and organic matter building to condition salt-affected soil. "I'd have to use a less effective broadleaf contact herbicide to remove alfalfa from my fields contaminated by Roundup Ready traits," he said.

In 2006, WORC, DRC, the Center for Food Safety, and others sued USDA for its illegal approval of Monsanto's GM alfalfa, contending the agency failed to conduct an EIS, as required by law, before approving the crop. The federal courts agreed and banned planting of GM alfalfa until USDA assessed the affects of GM alfalfa on the environment, farmers, and the public in an EIS.

The deadline for submitting comments on the draft EIS was March 3. According to a news release by the National Organic Coalition, more than 200,000 people have sent comments opposing deregulation of GM alfalfa.

The joint comments by DRC and WORC are available at www.worc.org.

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

Based in Billings, Mont., WORC is a network of grassroots organizations representing farmers, ranchers, landowners, and consumers in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

###