

## Call for Farmer Testimonials on GM Alfalfa: What will GM Alfalfa mean to you?

**Deadline: March 31, 2011**

About CBAN: The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN) is coordinating a campaign with farmer and organic sector groups to stop genetically modified (GM) alfalfa. For information and updates please contact us or visit <http://www.cban.ca/alfalfa> CBAN Members are: ACT for the Earth (Toronto), Biofreedom (Edmonton), Canadian Organic Growers, Check Your Head, Coalition for Safe Food (B.C.), Council of Canadians, Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario, Food Action Committee of Ecology Action Centre, Halifax, GE Free Yukon, GeneAction (Toronto), Greenpeace Canada, Inter Pares, National Farmers Union, P.E.I. Coalition for a GMO-Free Province, Saskatchewan Organic Directorate, Society for a G.E. Free B.C., Union Paysanne, USC Canada. <http://www.cban.ca>

The Request: Please tell us how GM alfalfa will affect your farm and farm business. The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN) is asking farmers to send testimonials about the direct impact you foresee with GM alfalfa. Your testimonial could be as short as a few lines and will be used to help educate politicians and consumers about the important role of alfalfa in food and farming, and to push for the moratorium on GM alfalfa.

The Issue: GM alfalfa has been approved for planting in the US and is one step away from being sold as seed in Canada. Farmers' voices on the impacts of GM alfalfa have been heard in House of Commons Agriculture Committee hearings and have been influential in making a motion for a moratorium on GM alfalfa happen. The motion is currently being debated in the Committee with support from all parties except the Conservatives.

Your Testimonial: We will post your testimonial on our website and use it in communications to politicians and consumers. We just need your testimonial and your permission to publish it with your name and region, we will not publish your contact details. Your testimonial could be as short as a couple of sentences or a couple of paragraphs. Please see below two examples from other farmers. Please write what you want politicians and consumers to know about what GM alfalfa would mean to you.

Please send your testimonial by March 31, 2011 or direct any questions or other comments to Lucy Sharratt, Coordinator, Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, [coordinator@cban.ca](mailto:coordinator@cban.ca) Phone: 613 241 2267 ext 25 Fax: 613 241 2506, 431 Gilmour Street, Second Floor, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K2P 0R5 or contact us for more information.

In addition, you can send your testimonial directly to your MP and members of the Agriculture Committee. Visit <http://www.cban.ca/alfalfa> for contacts.

Thank you so much for your contribution and for sharing your experience and perspective with us!

Best regards,

Lucy Sharratt, Coordinator, Canadian Biotechnology Action Network

Ann Slater, Ecological Farmers of Ontario

Tom Rudge, Organic Farmer, Yukon

## **EXAMPLES**

From Ann Slater, organic farmer, Lakeside, Ontario

I am a small certified organic market gardener in southwestern Ontario. Even though I am primarily a market gardener, alfalfa is a key ingredient for my certified organic vegetables. The sheep I raise, to produce manure which I make into compost to fertilize my garden, rely on alfalfa as their main source of feed over the winter months. In addition, I use alfalfa hay or alfalfa/grass hay as mulch in my fields, again adding valuable nutrients which allow me to grow and market certified organic vegetables.

As an organic farmer, I am well aware of the contamination issues faced by organic farmers in western Canada both with canola and more recently with flax. Organic canola farmers lost a market, and therefore, a crop in their rotation and marketing plans because of genetic contamination. Canola is wind pollinated, alfalfa is insect pollinated – the potential for genetic contamination is greater with alfalfa than it was with canola. If GE alfalfa is approved and grown in Canada, without some stringent regulations requiring the growers of GE alfalfa to make prevention of contamination a first priority, we will see the organic farm community decimated across the country. Alfalfa is simply irreplaceable as a feed for livestock and as a nutrient source, in many forms, for crops from vegetables to wheat. Organic standards do not allow the use of GE technology in any form on our farms.

I am an organic farmer, but I also live in a rural area surrounded by non-organic farms. I have asked many of my neighbours what benefit GE alfalfa will have for them. I am still waiting to hear a farmer tell me they want GE alfalfa to be approved – that they can see a benefit for their farm operation. After these discussions, I must conclude that it is not farmers who want or need GE alfalfa, therefore, it must be the company selling the seed who wants to be able to sell one more higher cost input to farmers.

---

From Tom Rudge, organic farmer, Yukon

Alfalfa is an essential source of nutrients and organic matter for any organic rotation including feed or soil building green manure. It is grown in many places and is a major export regionally, nationally and internationally as pellets, cubes, fodder, sprouts and seed.

It is evident with canola, that no containment is possible and growing organic canola is virtually impossible. It would be worse with alfalfa. With the flax crisis, export markets were severely affected and there has never been any epidemiological study done on any genetically engineered crop.

Here, in the Yukon, we have possibly the last buffered region in Canada to prevent the contamination of pure seed and we also have feral alfalfa growing in several communities that wildlife relies on for nutrients into the long harsh winters. Organic farmers and chemical farmers alike grow alfalfa here for a burgeoning local livestock market and for green manure.

We don't export alfalfa, however, alfalfa feed and seed is shipped up the highway to the Yukon to supplement our own small production and if genetically modified alfalfa seed is ever approved in Canada, the Yukon will be contaminated even if it is not cultivated here. Organic growers will lose their ability to grow one of the best crops available to them and possibly lose their livelihood in the process. There is zero containment possible, canola proved this. My choice as a farmer has been unilaterally taken from me, I will have contamination, my livelihood is taken away and no one is held

liable. No one is accountable; not the company that supplies the seed, not the farmer who will grow it nor the government who put in place the regulations allowing the contamination to occur. That is a devastating scenario.

I cannot stand against any company like Monsanto and their billion dollar budgets for marketing, lobbying and legal enforcement. There are thousands of small farming families across Canada who cannot possibly stand up against the multinationals. This is why we rely on the due diligence of our elected representatives in the house of parliament.