

# Conservatives Block Vote on Moratorium on GM Alfalfa

Motion stalled in Agriculture Committee

Friday March 11, 2011. Ottawa.

Yesterday in Ottawa, Conservative members of the House of Commons Agriculture Committee stalled a vote on a motion to place a moratorium on the approval of genetically modified (GM) alfalfa. The motion was supported by members from the three other parties and would therefore have been approved by the Committee to go to the House of Commons for a vote, if the vote had not been delayed.

“Conservatives are playing politics with our future,” said Genevieve Grossenbacher, a young Quebec farmer who attended yesterday’s hearing. “I was shocked by the way the Conservative members wasted time instead of really debating the motion or allowing a vote. It was clear they were delaying on purpose and it’s unacceptable when there’s so much at stake for farmers.”

Sixteen members of the public, including local farmers, scientists and a concerned citizen from Toronto, attended the meeting in Ottawa to show their support for the moratorium.

“It makes no sense that Conservatives delayed a decision when we have consensus in the farming community that GM alfalfa needs to be stopped,” said Ann Slater of the Ecological Farmers of Ontario, “Its urgent that our politicians do something real to protect us from the huge threat of GM alfalfa. I hope Members of Parliament understand how urgently we need this moratorium.”

The motion for a moratorium was brought forward by Liberal members of the Committee and was supported by the NDP and Bloc Québécois members. The motion was proposed after a year of protracted debate and public pressure to support Bill C-474, an NDP Private Members Bill that would have required study of the export market harm that can be caused by GM crops, and testimony from farmers at ongoing Committee hearings on biotechnology.

“Conservatives on the Committee said that farmers in their ridings were concerned about GM alfalfa, so why not act?” asked Lucy Sharratt of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network.

“It is farmers who will pay the costs of contamination if GM alfalfa is approved and we will see the organic farm community decimated across the country,” said Arnold Taylor, a Saskatchewan organic grain farmer and spokesperson for the Canadian Organic Growers. “Alfalfa is irreplaceable as a feed for livestock and as a nutrient source for crops.” Organic farming prohibits the use of GMOs.

In addition to export markets for processed alfalfa products, alfalfa is used as a forage crop in pastures and as hay for high-protein feed for dairy cows, beef cattle, lambs, and pigs. It is also a

natural source of nitrogen to fertilize the soil, making it particularly important for organic farming. Alfalfa is pollinated by bees and other insects, making it easy for contamination to spread. Alfalfa is also a perennial crop, meaning that each new GM alfalfa plant can grow and produce viable seed for several years.

[The motion before the Committee](#) asks the government to place a moratorium on approving the herbicide tolerant Roundup Ready alfalfa until the Government completes public research: “(a) into Canada’s ability to ensure the genetic integrity, production and preservation of a diversity of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), non-GMO and organic alfalfa production; (b) the ability of Canada’s handling and transportation system to ensure segregation of forage seeds and detection of genetic co-mingling in alfalfa seeds and hay; (c) the development of industry-led, third party audit and verification systems;”

On January 27th, the US Department of Agriculture approved plantings of GM alfalfa despite widespread opposition from farmers and consumers, and after protracted legal cases. Without the proposed moratorium, Canada is only one step away from allowing GE alfalfa to be planted here.

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[www.cban.ca/alfalfa](http://www.cban.ca/alfalfa)