

Genetically Engineered Wheat is Destroying US Agriculture: Oregon Wheat Found Contaminated with GE Wheat

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that unapproved genetically engineered (GE) wheat was found growing in an Oregon wheat field. The discovery has implications for U.S. trade as Japan has already indicated it would stop purchasing U.S. wheat exports.

According to USDA officials, a Oregon farmer sprayed his wheat field, intending it to lay fallow for the next year. Despite multiple sprays of RoundUp, the farmer found so-called "volunteer" crops unexpectedly persisted, just as GE crops are engineered to do. The discovery prompted him to send samples to Carol Mallery Smith, scientist at Oregon State University, who determined that the crops were infused with the RoundUp Ready gene. USDA confirmed the results but officials have declined to comment on how the seeds ended up in this farmer's field to begin with considering Monsanto has not conducted field trials in Oregon since 2001 when it reportedly withdrew from the state.

Since 1994, Monsanto has conducted 279 field trials of RoundUp Ready wheat over more than 4,000 acres of land in 16 states. Tests have been conducted in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, and Wyoming. After facing intense opposition from farmers and activists, Monsanto reportedly stopped its efforts to introduce GE wheat, but restarted extensive field trials again in 2011.

Contamination of non-GE crops, particularly for USDA certified organic crops, is a serious concern. Worries about harm to human health and the environment have prompted several state legislatures to consider bills that would require labeling of products with GE ingredients so consumers know what they are eating. Additional legislation proposed by Senator Bill Bowman (R-ND) in 2002 would have allowed farmers in North Dakota the right to sue Monsanto if wheat was found to be contaminated with genetically modified crops. The discovery is likely to prompt similar legislation if not litigation.

USDA regulates GE herbicide-tolerant plants under the Plant Protection Act, however its scrutiny of the full range of potential human health and environmental effects has been challenged by environmental groups as inadequate. GE wheat is not approved to be grown in the U.S. or anywhere world-wide.

While the world's biggest wheat importer, Egypt, has made no move to stop importing U.S. wheat, Japan has cancelled its offer to buy U.S. western white wheat. Meanwhile the

European Union has prepared to begin testing shipments for the RoundUp Ready gene. These discoveries may have major implications for the U.S. economy, In 2012, exported wheat represented a gross sum of \$18.1 billion, with 90% of Oregon's wheat exported abroad.

"Nobody's going to want to buy wheat from the PNW (Pacific Northwest) for a while," said Roy Huckabay, analyst with the Linn Group in Chicago.

For more information on the environmental hazards associated with GE technology, visit Beyond Pesticides' Genetic Engineering webpage. The best way to avoid genetically engineered foods in the marketplace is to purchase foods that have the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Certified Organic Seal. Under organic certification standards, genetically modified organisms and their byproducts are prohibited. For many other reasons, organic products are the right choice for consumers.

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