

## **Groups Challenge USDA Approval of Genetically Engineered Alfalfa**

### **Questions and Answers:**

#### **Q: What is the lawsuit about?**

A: Genetically engineered alfalfa poses risks to family farmers and to the environment, and there has been no effort to address these economic and environmental threats. We are joining with the Center for Food Safety, Sierra Club and a broad coalition of farm and environmental groups and two individual seed farms in suing the U.S. Dept of Agriculture for approving this genetically engineered crop despite these scientific and economic concerns.

#### **Q: What are the risks to farmers from GE alfalfa?**

A: Genetically engineered alfalfa hay will contaminate natural alfalfa varieties, ultimately making it impossible for farmers to produce natural alfalfa. In particular, export buyers who want non-GE products will not accept the risk of contamination, so American farmers will lose those markets once genetically engineered alfalfa is planted here. Organic farmers also stand to lose their customers, since organic buyers demand products free from genetic contamination. Alfalfa is also important in honey production and is used for sprouts, so consumers who demand these non-GE foods will also be affected by contamination.

#### **Q: How does GE alfalfa contaminate natural alfalfa?**

A: Contamination can occur at many points from seed production to delivery to the end user of the hay. Bees that pollinate alfalfa can roam for miles, and could thus spread the gene altered trait to fields of natural hay. With other genetically engineered crops, dozens of contamination cases have already occurred, including through accidental seed mixing, through mixing in farm machinery, in grain silos, even from “volunteer” GE plants growing in natural crop fields. Once a GE variety is widely planted, contamination is inevitable and uncontrollable.

#### **Q: What are the risks to the environment?**

A: Alfalfa is the first perennial GE crop approved for commercial planting, and thus poses unique environmental risks. Before approving GE alfalfa, USDA did not address concerns about the potential for the GE crop to affect wild relatives of alfalfa or the impacts on endangered species from GE alfalfa.

#### **Q: What does GE alfalfa do?**

A: The GE alfalfa approved by USDA is a “Roundup Ready” crop produced by Monsanto; it is engineered to tolerate direct application of glyphosate, the active ingredient in the Roundup herbicide. Widespread planting of other Roundup Ready varieties has led to increased herbicide use and the spread of resistant weeds.

#### **Q: Don't GE crops reduce pesticide use?**

A: Roundup Ready crops like this genetically engineered alfalfa actually lead to increases in the amount of herbicides used. In alfalfa, this increased herbicide use is likely to be especially acute, since 83% of U.S. alfalfa currently is grown with no herbicides used. This will mean more chemical pollution and will increase farmers' dependency on chemical companies.

#### **Q: What are our export buyers saying about GE alfalfa?**

A: About 75% of U.S. alfalfa exports go to Japan, where consumers demand non-GE food. Many export buyers have opposed the approval of GE alfalfa and some say they will buy from other countries once alfalfa is widely grown here.