



Genetically Modified Crops in the Food Supply: The Threat to Your Health

Judith McGeary – May 9, 2011

The case against genetically modified (GM) crops has been growing for years. While there are no long-term studies on the health effects of eating food from GM crops, even short-term studies have raised very troubling questions. For example, a panel of scientists in India recently reviewed studies that purported to show that GM crops modified to produce Bt were safe. The reviewers concluded that the studies did not meet international standards, did not accurately summarize the results, and “ignored toxic endpoints” that occurred in rats that were fed the GM grain for just 3 months. The rats suffered organ and system damage to ovaries, spleens, and the immune system, and demonstrated toxic effects to the liver [*L. Gallagher, BT Brinjal Event EEa: The Scope and Adequacy of the GEAC Toxicological Risk Assessment: Review of Oral Toxicity Studies in Rats (2010)*]. Other studies have come to similar conclusions, namely that even a relatively short period of feeding GM foods to lab animals indicate serious potential health impacts.

Despite that, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) continues to allow GM crops to enter our food supply without labeling, leaving the majority of Americans in the dark about the fact that almost every processed food contains ingredients from GM corn, soy, and/ or canola.

As serious as these problems are, the concerns over GM crops rose to an even higher level recently. On January 17, 2011, Dr. Don M. Huber, an internationally recognized plant pathologist and Professor Emeritus from Purdue University, sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack warning him of a previously unknown pathogen that “should be treated as an emergency.” As explained in the letter, the pathogen poses a serious threat to plant health, animal health, and potentially human health – and has been connected to GM crops engineered to be resistant to the herbicide Roundup, whose active ingredient is glyphosate.

“Roundup Ready” crops, as they are called, allow farmers to spray the herbicide glyphosate to kill weeds throughout the growing season. This has two effects: it significantly increases the amount of glyphosate used and results in glyphosate residues on the crop itself.

As outlined in Dr. Huber’s letter and subsequent materials, veterinarians first identified this organism in livestock herds experiencing extremely high rates, up to 45%, of spontaneous abortions and infertility rates of 20% and higher. The vets confirmed that the pathogen was the cause of the problem, and then searched for the source of the pathogen, ultimately finding it in the animals’ feed. The contaminated feeds were made from Roundup Ready soy, Roundup Ready corn, and crops raised for feed in fields treated with glyphosate.

The connection was then made with plant pathologists who have been working to understand the growing scope and severity of plant diseases such as Goss’ Wilt in corn and Sudden Death Syndrome (SDS) in soybeans. When examined, the new pathogen was found in very high levels in the infected crops.

Dr. Huber’s January letter urged Secretary Vilsack not to approve Roundup Ready alfalfa and to conduct research on the relationship between Roundup Ready crops, glyphosate, and this new pathogen. The USDA chose to ignore this warning and less than three weeks later approved two new GMO crops, including Monsanto’s Roundup Ready alfalfa, creating a threat to the primary forage feed crop for US livestock.

The letter, although intended to be confidential, was leaked by a third party, after which Dr. Huber gave permission for the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance and others to post it. The now-public letter unleashed a storm of accusations and recriminations, including a quick response from Monsanto. Yet, while Monsanto and its allies attacked the letter, they presented no evidence that contradicted it – just their own unsupported claims that circled around Dr. Huber’s statements without addressing them directly.



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At the request of other scientists and European leaders, Dr. Huber wrote a [second, more in-depth letter](#) in March which can be read at the Farm and Ranch Freedom website.

Last week, Food Democracy Now! released an exclusive [20-minute interview](#) with Dr. Huber in which he explains the issues. We encourage everyone to view it and share it with their friends and neighbors. If you have trouble downloading the full video because of the file size, [shorter segments](#) of it are posted on the website of Food Democracy Now! Then scroll down the page to sign a petition urging President Obama to impose an immediate moratorium on GM alfalfa and sugar beets.

The Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund has joined a lawsuit against Monsanto that challenges the validity and enforceability of its patents on GM seeds. This lawsuit is an important piece of the overall campaign to protect our farmers and food from the many threats posed by genetically engineered crops. For more details, read "[FTCLDF in Suit over Monsanto GMO Seed](#)".

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Hyperlinks for the PDF

second, more in-depth letter – Letter from Dr. Huber to European Commission, March 2011 =
<http://farmandranchfreedom.org/Huber-European-letter>

20-minute interview - video posted by Food Democracy Now!, "Dr. Huber Explains Science Behind New Organism and Threat from Monsanto's Roundup, GMOs to Disease and Infertility", uploaded 28 April 2011=
<http://www.vimeo.com/22997532?ab>

shorter segments – video webpage at Food Democracy Now!, "Dr. Huber's Warning..." =
http://action.fooddemocracynow.org/sign/dr_hubers_warning

FTCLDF in Suit over Monsanto GMO Seed – Press Release April 13, 2011 =
<http://www.ftcldf.org/press/pr-ftcldf-suit-monsanto-gmo-seed.htm>