

Society for a Genetically Engineered Free BC December 2007 Newsletter

Mandatory labeling of GE food & toxins tackled by MLA's Private Member's Bills;
GE sugar beets & GE contaminated rice; big news from BC and the Yukon;
& *beet recipes for our holiday newsletter*

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Note: Volunteers needed for the Food Film Festival starting January 2008!

Editor: Julie Emerson

A The Right to Know: an interview with MLA Gregor Robertson
by Eleanor Boyle

Toxins in consumer products should be banned. Where that's not possible, the products should be labeled, so consumers know the risks. Sounds reasonable to Gregor Robertson, NDP MLA for Vancouver-Fairview. That's why he introduced two private member's bills to the B.C. legislature last month which could create the strictest regulation of toxins in North America.

"How could anybody disagree?" he asked in an interview with GE Free B.C. at his constituency office on Dec. 17. Many products sold in B.C. contain ingredients known or suspected to cause disease. Clearly it is "long overdue" that these be taken off the shelves or at least labeled with hazard symbols, he said. That's the purpose of the proposed legislation.

The Right to Know Act would require clear labeling of carcinogens and other potentially problematic substances in a wide range of products. It would mandate labeling of food containing genetically engineered (GE) ingredients. The Toxics Use Reduction Act would reduce or eliminate toxins in various consumer products from paint to pesticides.

B.C. needs to "catch up" with jurisdictions in Europe and elsewhere, according to Mr. Robertson, to create healthier environments by not tolerating hazardous substances. What's needed is creative involvement from citizens.

"If there's huge pressure from the public, as there has been about climate change, and as there has been about protecting kids who are at risk," he said, then toxins can

become an issue in the next provincial election. Mr. Robertson asks that concerned citizens brainstorm ways to help give this issue the profile it deserves. The general public already wants information and the right to choose. Polls show that the vast majority of consumers approve of labeling of GE foods, and experts have called for GE labelling, including B.C. provincial health officer Perry Kendall in his 2005 annual report. “But government won’t act,” said the MLA, “unless there’s urgency and real pressure.”

Mr. Robertson introduced his two proposed bills in mid-November. Like most private members’ bills, these have died on the order paper but can be re-introduced, as Mr. Robertson plans to do early in the new year.

Under the Right to Know Act, products would need to display ‘hazard labels’ if they contain known carcinogens, hormone disrupters, mutagens or other pathogens, according to a press release from Mr. Robertson’s office. It would recognize all toxic substances that are classified as such by the World Health Organization, European Union, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It would create an information registry along with provincial advisory panels on toxic substances and on GE foods. An important component of this for Mr. Robertson is the labeling of GE foods, which he said are “spreading” virtually unchecked around the world.

Under the Toxics Use Reduction Act, B.C. would begin to rein in unhealthy substances that are already prohibited by the OECD and in other Canadian provinces and some U.S. states. It would ban pesticides used for residential or cosmetic purposes and around schools and daycares. It would require ongoing ‘bio-monitoring’ of a sample of B.C. residents, to gather information on what toxins exist and are the main health concerns. “In B.C. we have no idea what pollutants are the biggest threats,” he said.

One catalyst for Mr. Robertson’s pursuit of this issue was a 2006 study by the organization Environmental Defense which examined levels of toxic chemicals in the bodies of Canadian volunteers. Those included members of the Robertson family who were dismayed to discover that, despite active lives and healthy diets, their bodies contained PCBs and other dangerous compounds.

The Toxics Use Reduction Act would also aim to reduce provincial industry toxins by 50% by the year 2015. Chemicals targeted by the proposed legislation include lead, formaldehyde, some pesticides and herbicides, and some components in dyes, paints, inks, and plastics. Asked if disallowing such ingredients was technically feasible, Mr. Robertson said yes, absolutely. “In Europe, where many toxic products have been banned, industry has found other ways.” Business is creative, he observed, and can usually find substitute components or processes to do a job.

Banning toxins, however common sense, will be difficult both politically and in practice. “There’s a lack of political will,” he said. As well, “decades of inaction” have allowed the creation of tens of thousands of new chemicals contributing to cancers, pesticide poisonings, and other health problems, and forming a huge potential backlog for regulators. Politically in B.C., however, the Liberal government may not be entirely opposed. Mr. Robertson observed that government MLAs were “very quiet” in response to his proposed legislation, rather than openly dismissing it as is often done with private members’ bills. Potentially “the strongest legislation to regulate toxic substances in North America,” says Mr. Robertson, the bills could motivate discussion. “The important thing is getting going on this issue.”

The idea of banning or labeling toxins is supported by a broad range of individuals and groups, from the mainstream to the activist. Mr. Robertson said the initiative should appeal across the political spectrum, and that it fits with other current societal concerns. These include the cosmetic uses of pesticides – now banned in Vancouver and more than 100 other Canadian municipalities – and the import and sale of toys containing dangerous substances.

To help common sense prevail, Mr. Robertson urges supporters to sign the petition on his website (www.gregorbc.ca) then write letters to Premier Gordon Campbell (Gordon.Campbell.MLA@leg.bc.ca), Minister of Health George Abbott (George.Abbott.MLA@leg.bc.ca), Environment Minister Barry Penner (Barry.Penner.MLA@leg.bc.ca), and other individual MLAs. Mr. Robertson encourages supporters to convey the sense of urgency to government that would make toxics regulation an issue for the next election.

Red Spread for Bread

*This is raspberry-coloured and divinely nutty – far better than peanut butter . *vegan*

1 medium beet

1 cup raw cashews

1 tblsp. mild oil

1 tblsp. lemon juice

1 tblsp. honey or sugar

1 tblsp. water

pinch of cinnamon

Boil the beet for an hour or use a leftover cooked beet, and peel it. Cut it into pieces and place it in a food processor with all the other ingredients. Process it, scraping down the sides 3 or 4 times, until it's as smooth as peanut butter, with just tiny cashew bits. Spread on bread.

B Genetically engineered sugar: new GE sugar beets *by Julie Emerson*

The next genetically engineered crop in our processed foods, after corn, soy, and canola, is about to be planted in 2008: GE sugar beets. These beets are Monsanto's Roundup Ready; that is, genetically engineered to resist the Monsanto herbicide Roundup. Sugar beets provide about half our sugar. (The other half comes from imported sugar cane.)

GE sugar beets have been approved for use in Canada. The major Canadian beet crop is grown in southern Alberta, and some Ontario farmers are growing the white sugar beets for U.S. companies. In the EU, the GE sugar beet has been approved by default, as happens when EU ministers cannot agree on a decision within 3 months.

Although Kellogg's and Hershey's have been reluctant to take on GE sugar beets, consumer attitudes are said to have "softened". What's your attitude toward the presence of an unlabeled and untested genetically engineered ingredient in your food?

There is a risk of spreading transgenic traits of these beets to wild members of the beet family in cases when some beets overwinter, flower, and spread their pollen.

Sugar beets will also be a player in the global game of Food or Fuel, and agrofuel projects are heavily funded by the Conservative government. Atlantec BioEnergy is planning a sugar beet ethanol plant in Prince Edward Island. 11 farms

have done a field trial of sugar beets, and the goal is to persuade enough farmers to plant 7300 hectares of them. Will Monsanto dominate the market with its GE seeds so that PEI farmers will be planting GE sugar beets?

In the next newsletter, we'll suggest action that may be taken to avoid a future of unknowingly consuming GE sugar. Now enjoy eating that good old red root vegetable - non-GMO, not processed into sugar - the beet.

Crimson Flans

These festive pink custards can be served in their cups for dessert, or slipped out and topped with thinly sliced avocado for a savoury holiday course.

2 small or 1 medium beet, baked or boiled til done, and peeled

1 tsp. grated orange peel

1 cup fromage frais (or cream cheese)

2 eggs

1 tblsp. honey

a pinch of mace or nutmeg, and ginger

Preheat oven to 350 and butter 3 porcelain ½ cup custard dishes. Combine all ingredients thoroughly in a processor. Scrape down the sides several times until smooth. Pour into the custard dishes. Place them in a square or round cake pan and add a few cm. of water to the pan in the oven. Bake for 45-50 minutes. They will puff up like mini soufflés, then deflate. Chill to set them, and serve cold or at room temperature.

C Kootenays Report

by Jon Steinman,

Deconstructing Dinner CJLY / Community Food Matters www.cjly.net/deconstructingdinner

On November 10, 2007, 23 Nelson-area residents gathered for a full-day to begin strategizing around the creation of a GE Free Kootenays region. The day was sponsored by GE Free BC, Greenpeace, the Green Party, Community Food Matters and it received support from the Kootenay Country Store Co-operative.

The event was sparked by an idea by Aimee Watson of the Kaslo Food Security Project, and was later supported by Tony Beck of GE Free BC, Josh Brandon and Jessica Stevenson of Greenpeace, Tom Rudge of GE Free Yukon, Jenny Macleod of the District A Farmers' Institutes, and Angela Reid of the Green Party. All seven travelled to Nelson where they were joined by Farmer Anne Warren, NDP Agriculture Critic/MP Alex Atamanenko, City Councillor Gord McAdams, Regional District Director Andy Shadrack, Green Party candidates, and a host of others representing regional environmental organizations. Provincial NDP Agriculture Critic and the Nelson-Creston MLA Corky Evans was unable to attend, but has expressed his eagerness to be involved in the evolution of this campaign.

The region seems like an ideal place to launch a GE-Free campaign. MP Alex Atamanenko is at the forefront in Ottawa of challenging the presence of genetically engineered food on Canadian grocery store shelves. Alex tabled two private members bills this year; one calling for a ban on Terminator seed technology, and another calling for the mandatory labelling of genetically modified food.

Alex was extremely excited by the event, and he wrote a personal letter following his participation, thanking the host group Community Food Matters (CFM). CFM is a

coalition of Nelson businesses, organizations, institutions and individuals who represent the voice of food security in Nelson.

The full day has been documented by Kootenay Co-op Radio's Deconstructing Dinner. As a member of CFM and the Producer/Host of the show, I intend to use these recordings as the foundation for an upcoming broadcast on what it takes for other Canadian communities to begin strategizing around the creation of a GE-Free zone. You can expect a one-hour broadcast to air in January, and unedited recordings from the event will appear soon on the Deconstructing Dinner website above. We intend to keep you informed through this newsletter as to the evolution of this campaign.

Also stay tuned for a broadcast on the creation of a grain CSA (community supported agriculture) that will be linking up farmers in Creston with consumers there and in Nelson. As the grains to be grown will be non-GE, this project of the West Kootenay Eco-Society and Wildsight, may be one critical step in the creation of a GE-Free zone. Farmers certainly do not want to be told what to grow, and this project marks the creation of a serious alternative for farmers in the Creston area who currently grow GE-Canola.

For more information on the campaign, contact Aimee Watson at eemiamay@yahoo.ca

Red Confetti Muffins

Sweet moist muffins full of red vegetable confetti – and no raw beet taste. If it's hard to believe this use of a root vegetable, remember carrot cake. The way to avoid heavy muffins with dark bottoms when you use oil & grated vegetables is to add the oil in a slow stream to emulsify it.

yield: 6 medium muffins

2 small raw beets (or 1 medium)

1 egg

½ cup plain yogourt

½ cup honey

¼ cup mild-tasting oil

1 tsp. grated orange rind (optional)

1 tsp. ground cinnamon

1 tsp. baking soda

dash of salt

1 ½ cups unbleached white flour

Put the peeled beets in the processor with the mixing blade and process them into little bits. Remove them to a bowl. Preheat the oven to 350 and oil the bottoms of the 6 cups of a muffin tin. Rinse and dry the processor. Into it, put the egg, yogourt, honey, and orange rind and process well. With it running & the chute open, pour in the oil in a slow stream. In a big bowl, combine the cinnamon, soda, salt, & flour. Put the beets in the bowl, too. Now, with a rubber spatula, trowel out the processed mixture into the bowl. Gently mix it all together. The batter will turn a dusky rose colour; (but in the oven, the white flour will revert to a light colour and the red confetti will stand out.) Divide among the muffin cups and bake about 20 minutes. Wrapped individually, they freeze well, too.

Variations: For extra colour, add ½ cup green pistachios. Hammer the pistachios a bit to break them into halves or thirds before adding them with the beets. OR You can add some toasted walnuts.

D Vancouver Island Report *by Tony Beck*

GE Free BC and partners are planning a strategy session in Comox in March 2008, and a series of events across Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands throughout 2008 to make Vancouver Island a GE free zone.

Why a GE Free Zone?

Developing GE free zones has been a successful strategy for opposing genetic engineering in Europe, Japan, Australia and the U.S. Most work on GE free zones has involved passing a municipal resolution that opposes the cultivation of G.E. crops. While this does not have any force in law (i.e. it is not a by-law), it sends a clear message that GE is not wanted in the jurisdiction. Where a resolution is already in place, a by-law could be attempted. As well as protesting against genetic engineering, working on GE free zones is a useful way to form local networks around food security issues.

In Europe there are now over 4,500 GE free zones. Powell River was the first GE free zone in Canada, and we want to extend this across B.C!

Strategy session in Comox in March 2008:

The objectives will be to:

- Continue the province-wide networking on GE Free zones
- Share strategies between campaigners working on G.E. Free Zones
- Determine how to take the Vancouver Island campaign forward over the next year.

Your Participation:

We will be setting up an organizing committee for the strategy session in Comox; compiling a list of all interested individuals and organizations on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands; organizing community events; collecting signatures for petitions; and lobbying farmers, politicians and businesses. We need help in all these activities.

Contact Tony Beck at gefreebc07@yahoo.com

Raw Red Relish

**raw & vegan*

Have you had the sweet orange/carrot/beet juice at Rebar Restaurant in Victoria? Raw Red Relish is similar, colourful, and you can mound it on your plate and eat it by the spoonful.

1 small beet

1 large carrot

1 large organic orange

1 or 2 dates (Medjoul are nice and plump)

Peel the beet & halve it, peel the carrot & chop it roughly. Cut a 1" x 3" section of orange peel off and reserve it; discard the rest of the peel. Quarter the orange. Pit and halve one date. Put beet, carrot, peel, orange, and date in the food processor, in that order, to chop very finely. Taste it, and if the orange didn't make it quite sweet enough, add another date.

E Yukon Report *by Tom Rudge*

Government response to the GE Free Yukon petition

Our petition asking for a 10 year moratorium on the planting of any genetically engineered seed in the Yukon was tabled, and on December 10, 2007, the Minister responsible for the Agriculture portfolio in the Yukon, the Honorable Archie Lang, responded. Minister Lang outlined what GE is and how long it's been in existence. He mentioned the fact that neither Health Canada, nor the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, nor Environment Canada, have seen any reason to ban this technology. He also mentioned that no concerns have been raised on health issues, seeing as these food items have been on the store shelves for years. His detailed response can be viewed in its entirety at <http://gefrees.yukonfood.com/update3.html>

Replies

Letters addressing many points, including the promising aspects of his response, were sent to the Minister's office as well as to the Director of Agriculture, Tony Hill. So far the Minister's office has not replied; however, an email was received from Tony Hill's office. Mr. Hill suggests there is no difference between a moratorium and a ban because he sees the enforcement of either will be essentially the same. He also cannot see any advantages to a moratorium as there aren't any GE crops currently available for growing here in the Yukon.

Many thoughts are coming forward now as to what it means for both producers and consumers to create the moratorium and Mr. Hill thinks there is still room for an industry-led solution, as opposed to Government involvement. No one is willing or ready to ban this technology but the door is open now for discussion.

Thanks to you, our supporters

Many thanks go out to the supporters of this petition and for all of the emails that were sent. There were just over 50 emails that were cc'd to gefreesyukon over a 2 week period and there may well have been a few more sent to the Government and agriculture department. All emails received through gefreesyukon indicated strong, unconditional support for the Government to table the petition. It was an amazing feeling to receive so much positive support for this initiative. Although these emails do not form part of the petition, they were an indication that this issue involves much more than what goes on within Yukon borders.

Our future

More work is needed to move this initiative forward. Mr. Hill has agreed to discuss this issue and is looking forward to our meeting in the New Year. A letter to the editor will go out to the local newspapers, which have been very supportive and helped tremendously in the awareness of the issue of GE seeds in the Yukon.

Please feel free to check the website and keep informed of the details. To comment please email gefrees@yukonfood.com. The tide is moving now and people are becoming much more aware of what is happening to our food systems. If it can happen here in the Yukon, it can happen elsewhere.

Double Red: Beets & Cranberries

*This is a wonderful side dish or relish, as jammy as blackberries. *vegan*

4 beets

1 cup orange juice

1 cup frozen or fresh whole cranberries

¼ cup honey or maple syrup

Peel beets. Slice them into 1 cm. thick slices, then dice into approximately 1 cm. cubes. In a covered saucepan, cook beets in orange juice for 30 minutes. Most of the liquid will evaporate. Add the cranberries and the honey or maple syrup and cook for 15 more minutes, stirring occasionally. Taste and add a dash of salt if you like.

F Supermarket rice contaminated with experimental GE rice

by Josh Brandon

Government fails to detect illegal, genetically engineered variety

An independent investigation by Greenpeace has found rice sold in Canadian supermarkets to be contaminated with an experimental, genetically engineered variety accidentally released into the environment.

Greenpeace is demanding that all long grain rice imported from the United States be removed from store shelves in Canada after independent testing confirmed that rice purchased at two supermarkets in Vancouver and Montreal was contaminated with a variety of genetically engineered rice not approved for human consumption by Health Canada.

“There are no assurances that this genetically engineered rice is safe for people to eat,” said Josh Brandon, agriculture campaigner with Greenpeace. “Even if genetically engineered food was labelled, which it isn’t anywhere in Canada, we would not know about the presence of this variety because of lax testing on the part of the authorities.”

The rice entered the American food chain sometime after 2001 following field trials at nine sites in Arkansas and Louisiana conducted by Bayer, the German multinational chemical corporation, which designed the rice to tolerate its brand of herbicide. Bayer only disclosed the contamination last year.

Many countries took immediate steps to identify contaminated shipments. Rice exports from the United States to Europe were suspended, while Japan tested all U.S. rice imports. So far, contamination has been confirmed in 30 countries, costing farmers, governments and the rice industry, Greenpeace estimates, more than a billion dollars. The Canadian government waited several months before implementing a very weak testing program, and then discontinued testing altogether last fall after failing to detect the presence of the experimental rice.

Recognizing that the testing was inadequate, Greenpeace last month sent rice purchased at Provigo at 50 Ave Mont-Royal in Montreal and at Buy Low Foods in the Kingsgate Mall at 370 East Broadway in Vancouver to Genetic ID, an independent testing facility in Fairfield, Iowa. The presence of the experimental GE rice, LLRICE601, was found in both samples.

“If the Canadian government had taken the kinds of measures adopted by countries such as the UK, Russia or the Philippines, they would have found this experimental rice long ago, and it would not be found on store shelves across Canada today,” continued Brandon. “Instead, Canadians are being experimented with, as this country becomes a dumping ground for genetically engineered rice that the rest of the world has already rejected.”

Contaminated Rice samples:

- *No Name brand, long grain white rice, imported by Loblaws, product code 166J2, bar code, 60383 00833.*
- *Western Family brand, imported by Overwaitea, best before date: 09 07 16, bar code 62639 17323*