

Society for a Genetically Engineered Free BC November 2007 Newsletter

Find out about GE beer and about great strides in B.C. and the Yukon.

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To volunteer or send event notices, email: gefreebc@yahoo.ca website: www.gefreebc.org
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A Vancouver Coastal Health Calls for Mandatory Labeling / Four Risks of GM

The Chief Medical Officer of Vancouver, Dr. John Blatherwick, has called for the mandatory labeling of Genetically Modified seeds and food. In a letter to the Provincial Minister of Health, George Abbott, he urged the province to follow the recommendations of both the Provincial Health Officer in 2005, and the Royal Society of Canada in 2001 for mandatory labeling. He suggests this to ensure not only consumer choice but also the tracking and monitoring of the long-term effects of GMOs.

(Genetically Modified Organism = Genetically Engineered)

The background paper was prepared in June by Claire Gram, regional coordinator, Healthy Communities and Community Food Security. She cites the Precautionary Principle, used to err on the side of protecting human and environmental safety rather than on the side of unknown risks. **Here are the 4 areas of risk you should know about:**

1. **Allergy** - Allergens can be transferred into a GM food when adding a gene, and there is no definitive way to test for a new allergen in a GM food.
2. **Toxicity** - A transgenic food could result in an overexpression and overexposure of a toxin, such as in Monsanto's Mon863 corn. Health Canada gets its data on the safety of the GM product from - Monsanto!
3. **Antibiotic-resistant genes** – It is possible for the antibiotic-resistant genes used to manufacture GM food to transfer to the bacteria in the human intestine or cells in the body.
4. **Outcrossing** – A GM crop that is not approved for human consumption may contaminate food crops, such as the GM maize for animal feed which has been found in U.S. tortillas.

How about the cost of implementing mandatory labeling? 30% of Canada's food exports are already sent to 40 countries that require mandatory labeling (all of Europe, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan.)

Humans have been eating for millenia, but it was only 13 years ago that GM food was approved for use. Given the risks, consumers may choose to avoid it. North American producers of GM food have avoided voluntary labeling. For a healthy future, health professionals in in our city, our province, and our country have advised mandatory labeling of GM food.

You can access the report and responses at: www.vch.ca/public/advoacy

You can contact:

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B Is your BEER genetically engineered?

by Josh Brandon

You might remember Budweiser for their advertising slogans "Wassup!" and "True". True, what is up with Budweiser these days? Independent laboratory testing has revealed genetically engineered rice is being used to brew North America's best selling beer. The corporate braumeisters of Anheuser-Busch are using a GE rice that is untested, and illegal in Canada. But Labatt's, which holds the license to brew Budweiser in Canada, has so far refused to acknowledge the problem or confirm that Canadian beer supplies are free of contamination from genetically engineered rice.

The contamination

In 2006, over 30 percent of the US long grain rice crop was contaminated by multiple strains of genetically engineered (GE) rice. It is still not clear how this happened. We do know that these GE rice strains, called "Liberty Link", came from Germany's Bayer CropScience.

The plot thickened when it was revealed the GE rice that eventually ended up in Anheuser-Busch's brewing mix was supposed to be confined to test sites only. This GE rice was never cultivated or marketed for sale. The US Department of Agriculture retroactively approved the use of the Liberty Link rice strains, but their sale is still outlawed in most of the world. It seems that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has done everything possible to avoid finding contaminated rice; it has now stopped testing for GE rice altogether.

The contamination wreaked havoc with US rice farmers and processors. It is estimated in a class action lawsuit filed against Bayer that 63 percent of the US rice industry's export trade was disrupted. Orders and contracts were cancelled, products were removed from shelves, shipments were halted and recalls ordered. Testing and

certification requirements were imposed. There was extensive brand damage and a large loss of market share for US producers.

Anheuser-Busch's responsibility

Although Anheuser-Busch did not cause the genetic contamination of the rice, the company has a responsibility to their customers. It should have refused to purchase or use any rice contaminated by the GE strains. So far the only responsibility Anheuser-Busch has taken is to threaten to sue the environmental group Greenpeace for exposing this problem. They have gone so far as to suggest they hold the trademark on the word "True" and that other organizations using this word are guilty of copyright infringement. True!

Anheuser-Busch has made a commitment to use only GE free ingredients at its brewery in Wuhan, China, but has to date refused to make the same commitment to American, Canadian and European consumers. What's up with that?!

GE Free BC joins Greenpeace in calling on the makers of Budweiser, Anheuser-Busch as well as its Canadian partner Labatt's:

- A)** to make a global commitment - for itself, its partners and subsidiaries - that it will be GE free in all its beer ingredients, and
- B)** to actively oppose the growing of GE rice including current fields in Arkansas being cultivated by Bayer CropScience.

GE-Free Beer in B.C.

The director of the Granville Island Brewery and director of the BC Craft Brewers Association, Walter Cosman, says, "I feel there is no place in the brewing industry for GE food." He assured Phil Harrison of GE Free BC that Granville Island beer does not contain any GE ingredients. Three BC companies produce organic GE-free beers: Crannog Ales, Nelson Brewing Company, and Natureland (Pacific Western Brewing Company), and locally produced organic products in general are GE free.

You can also choose imports from Europe or other places that are generally GE free. Keep in mind that some of the big European multinational companies may be producing in Canada, and their domestically produced products often contain GE corn or other ingredients. For example, Stella Artois is owned by InBev, the company that produces Labatts and Budweiser in Canada. They have singled out Canada as the one market around the world that they do NOT guarantee as GE Free.

Unibroue, the Quebec company that makes several popular brands including Maudite and Blanche de Chambly, had a GE Free policy several years ago. They were recently bought up by a Japanese multinational. So far, Sapporo has yet to reconfirm their GE Free commitment. Greenpeace has sent letters to major beer companies around the world asking for their policy. Stay tuned for the results of this survey in the next issue of this newsletter.

C The Yukon's drive to become a GE Crop Free Zone by Tom Rudge

There has been a groundswell of support and promise for the GE Free Yukon campaign over the last year. With less than 1% of Canada's population living here, we have a very strong desire on many levels to keep this place livable for our children. This campaign has never been about just health issues and the raw science of genetic engineering; it has been about awareness for the consumer, support for our environment, the

livelihood of small scale local farming, and eating well within a sustainable system in our fragile ecosystem.

Background

The GE Free Yukon campaign was truly inspired by the initial work of the Council of Canadians, with Tara Scurr and Tony Beck. The seed was planted in the minds of Yukoners and was carefully tended for several years with the formation of a local group of concerned food advocates. With up to date information and developments from the internet, and NGOs such as GE Free BC, Canadian Biotechnology Action Network and Beyond Factory Farming, the reasons and motivation for such a project were built.

Following PEI's attempt at GE Free status, it was clear that attempting to move forward solely on the issue of health would not be easy. With the public viewing of the film *The Future of Food* last spring, more support was garnered for the project and subsequently the idea of a petition was founded.

There were open discussions with the Yukon Agriculture department. They said that at this time they would not entertain a ban of GE crops within the Yukon nor the transport of products, due in large part to the fact that everywhere across Canada GE crops are legal. With more dialogue, however, there was the idea of a moratorium. This would in effect keep out the GM crops, while the pros and cons of how these entities would possibly affect the Yukon could be studied.

Currently, support is very strong for this idea within a broad cross section of the population. The petition was presented to the local agriculture association, predominantly hay growers. They wanted more information on the idea. Although this association reads the Western Producer and takes all their information as farming gospel, they are willing to listen to the idea if there could be some financial/marketing gain from it. The Organic Growers association and other environmental groups have all written letters of support. The local chamber of commerce has an upcoming lunch discussion on this with several members doing a presentation in support of the GE Free campaign.

The Farmers' Market

Over the summer months, our petition was showcased at one of the Fireweed Community Market's booths. The booth was run purely on a volunteer basis with other groups such as the Growers of Organic Food Yukon, the Market society itself, and by the GE Free campaign. To create a social atmosphere for dialogue on Organic issues and GE Free material, a local fair trade, organic coffee roaster developed a special blend of coffee which was sold per cup by donations (for the Organic sector and GE Free campaign). Close to \$1,000 was raised.

Outside of the market, awareness was brought to the table during the strategic planning session for the new Yukon Agriculture Development plan. Now with the final draft up for public scrutiny. one of the priorities of this 5 year plan is to examine the issues surrounding a GE crop free designation for the Yukon.

Sustainability Includes Food

The City of Whitehorse recently held a similar planning session on sustainability and what that means for the City in the short, medium and long term. No food or agriculture speakers were invited - imagine sustainability without talking about food issues? However, one organic grower attended all 4 days of the planning session, and now

sustainable food issues are a priority on the city's list. A permanent market location was determined, and the GE Free Yukon petition was brought up several times.

North of 60

The Agriculture branch held their North of 60 Agricultural conference November 3-4th.. Saturday afternoon focus sessions were presentations made by Agricultural specialists from Alberta on both side of the GM issue, opening a constructive dialogue on the good and bad effects this technology may have on the Yukon. I spoke on the petition and on the Terminator Technology issue.

First Nations

Just under 25% of population of The Yukon is First Nations, and they have been invited to send in any questions or letters of support. The health officer for the Council of Yukon First Nations is also taking interest on this issue and will be moving it forward within her network.

The Petition

The Yukon Party in power has been requested to present and table this petition for examination. From when it is tabled, the Government has 8 days in which to decide whether or not to accept the petition and move forward with it, or set it aside. That 8 day period is when calls have to be made and emails sent to the MLAs to push for this issue to be examined.

If the recommendation is made and accepted, then the next phase of implementation will start: the actual research into the GM issue. This should move ahead and then we'll tackle the issue with more ideas and increased support from the consumer. Perhaps by then labelling will be enforced as well.

Just before we submit the petition in mid November, James MacKinnon, co-author of *The 100-Mile Diet*, will be giving a talk here, just because we love the book, (and it helps that his brothers decided to live here.)

This process has been long, but not without it successes. The timing and events surrounding all of these issues have been incredible. Now we must support the decision-making process by lobbying the people we voted in to represent us, to create a GE Crop Free Yukon.

➔ The petition for a GE Crop Free Yukon is at the end of this newsletter. You can print it, get your friends to sign it, and send it before November 9th, by FAX to: (867) 668-6101, by Mail to Box 30058, Whitehorse YT Y1A 5M2, or by hand to 807 Black Street (downtown Whitehorse)

D International News:

Syngenta shoots Brazilian farmworkers protesting GE Crops
by Mary Ellen Belfiore

An armed militia contracted by Syngenta attacked 150 Brazilian rural workers who occupied an experimental field trial of Syngenta seeds at Santa Teresa do Oeste, Brazil, on October 21, 2007. A leader of the Landless Worker Movement was shot dead at point blank range, and six others were injured. The workers were protesting the production of GMO soy and maize seeds and wanted to turn the land into a GMO-free centre for Agroecology. La Campesina, an international peasant movement, and the

International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), and Amnesty International condemn this shocking use of violence.

Syngenta, a Swiss transnational corporation, produces genetically modified crops and seeds and is the 3rd largest seed company in the world, with sales of 8.1 billion in 2006. Syngenta does business in Canada with sales of Bt corn varieties; in 2003 gave the University of Guelph \$300,000 to promote research and communications in the agri-food industry.

The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network, CBAN, with the Union Paysanne and the NFU and Organic Growers will send letters of protest to the Ambassador of Brazil in Canada. For up-to-date information on the Canadian protest, go to www.cban.org

La Campesina is calling for action against Syngenta offices on November 8th and December 10th and letters of protest and support to Swiss and Brazilian embassies. La Campesina is demanding the expulsion of Syngenta from Brazil, the expropriation of lands for growing native seeds, protection of rural farm workers, and punishment of the criminals involved. For details on letter writing campaign, visit www.viacampesina.org

E BC Coastal Farmers Institutes' Statement for GE Free Agriculture

The Farmers' Institutes of Vancouver Island and the Southern Gulf Islands, in a general meeting of the District A Farmers Institutes held August 11, proposed four strong statements to express their concerns about creating a sustainable, secure, local food supply. They adopted the following statements of intent:

- 1) they have grave concerns about the safety of the use of terminator seed technology
- 2) they support the goal of District A being a GMO Free Zone
(Genetically Modified Organism = Genetically Engineered)
- 3) they support the reconfirmation of farmers' right to save seeds
- 4) they call for a moratorium on any land removal from the ALR, and support the idea that more land should be added to increase the Agricultural Land Reserve.

The Farmers' Institutes represent more than 600 farm families, and they are the main support of the 4H Clubs in B.C. The membership at their next AGM will be able to vote on whether these Intents will be made into policy. The Farmers' Institutes are addressing the long-term concerns that farmers will be forced to buy all their seeds from Monsanto and other corporations, and that their crops may become contaminated by GE crops and terminator seeds. They are also addressing the immediate crisis in farming that has resulted from the lack of slaughterhouses on Vancouver Island, and the assignment of agricultural land to non-agricultural purposes. Young people are not going into farming, and the future of our farms, our food supply, is in jeopardy.

- acknowledgements to the article by Jenny Brown McLeod in *Island Tides*, September 7, 2007

F ○ GE Free Kootenays Strategy Meeting

On Saturday, November 10th, Nelson Community Food Matters, Greenpeace, the Green Party of BC and the Society for a G.E. Free BC are holding a strategy session to help make the Kootenay region of B.C. a GE free zone by the end of 2008. Five food security activists from around the Province and the Yukon will

be attending the session in Nelson to hear local views on genetic engineering and share strategies.

Developing G.E. Free Zones has been a successful strategy for opposing genetic engineering in Europe, Japan, Australia and the U.S. In Europe there are now over 4,500 G.E. Free zones. Powell River was the first G.E. Free Zone in Canada, and we want to extend this across B.C!

For more details, or to get involved, contact Jon Steinman at 250-352-6597

○ SFU & GE Go to High School

Simon Fraser University students have partnered with GE Free BC to produce an interactive Tool Kit for workshops on genetic engineering in high schools. Six SFU graduate students in the ARX program, working with Lesley Johnston of the SFU Faculty of Health Sciences and Ava Waxman of GE Free BC, have consulted high school teachers to find out the most effective means of providing this information to their students. Their Tool Kit and Teaching Materials will be available for GE Free BC at the end of November.

G Breaking International News: EU Commissioners vote on GM maize

- with thanks to Angela Reid of the Green Party for this information

Europe's top environmental politician, Stravos Dimas, has refused to allow the cultivation of 2 kinds of GM maize. He said GM crops should not be approved until new methods have been developed for assessing long-term risks and the effects on birds and butterflies. This is great, but commercial interests may dissuade other EU Commissioners from supporting him in the upcoming vote in Brussels. You can send an email message now to Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission, and Commissioners Dimas, Kyprianou and Fischer-Boel, supporting Dimas' position against GMOs. Just click this link to Greenpeace. [**TAKE ACTION NOW**](#)

