

YUKON NEWS

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Lang's inaction seeds debate

By Genesee Keevil

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"I'm a certified organic farmer," said Rudge outside the legislature on Monday.

"So all of a sudden if that stuff gets onto my land, I'm out of business — that's my lifestyle?"

On November 26th, Rudge presented the Yukon Legislative Assembly with a petition calling for a 10-year moratorium on genetically modified seeds in the territory.

More than 1,500 people signed it.

"The petition didn't say ban it," said Rudge.

"It just said, let's have a moratorium so we have the time to look at this stuff"

But Archie Lang, minister responsible for the agricultural branch, "kyboshed it"

"We will continue to gather more information before any decisions regarding a moratorium or other limitations are made," said Lang in the house on Monday.

"We will work with our federal counterparts to learn more about this technology

The Yukon government is afraid to rock the boat, said Rudge.

"These people figure, let's move it to the federal level and let's see what they can do.

"Why doesn't the Yukon step up to the plate?"

"These guys purport to be strong and omnipotent and yet it sort of feels like they're passing it off."

The Yukon is one of the only regions in North America that hasn't been contaminated by genetically modified crops.

"It could be the one place where people made an educated decision to just hold off— call it a precautionary principle," said Rudge.

In the last six years, there's been a huge groundswell of interest in organics, he said.

Last month, 100 Mile Diet author James McKinnon came north and spoke about eating locally.

The organic growers are doing quite well supporting the local market that's in town, said Rudge.

And there are a lot of people looking for sustainable methods of seed production, he added.

"So, it hurts when they say (genetically modified seeds) are not going to be any big deal up in the Yukon, especially with regard to having a niche market?"

A genetically-engineered free zone might provide a niche market for Yukon agricultural exports, said Lang.

“On the other hand, this might limit our crop options in the future”

Besides, no genetically engineered crops are suitable for Yukon growing conditions, he said.

Not true, said Rudge.

“They are wrong in saying that some of this stuff won’t grow here, because some of it will”

It hasn’t been proven that genetically modified seeds would cause irreversible harm to the natural ecosystem, added Lang.

“Neither Health Canada nor the Canadian Food Inspection Agency nor Environment Canada have seen any reason to ban this technology”

The trouble is there haven’t been any long-term studies on the effects of genetically modified seeds, said Rudge.

“The Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Health Canada, all the studies they have taken have been short-term. And many of their results have come from the US Food and Drug Administration.

“But if you look at the Food and Drug Administration, you’ll find an amazing amount of co-operation between huge seed companies and the administration, with boards of directors quite often going back and forth between the two.

“So there’s no transparency there with what’s going on”

The UK’s Friends of the Earth agree with Rudge.

“(Genetically modified seeds) will pollute our food and country side and remove consumer choice:’ its senior food campaigner Pete Riley told the BBC.

“If anything goes wrong with this new technology, the potentially catastrophic consequences will be irreversible.

“We have to have a zero threshold for seeds, or else we close off the options for future generations.

“So if we want people to have a choice, and the environment to be protected, banning genetically modified crops in the UK is the only option”

Anywhere they’ve been introduced, genetically modified seeds have had a tremendous impact, said Rudge.

“Not only from the seeds themselves, but through the corporations that push these things forward”

Without the moratorium, a Yukoner could introduce genetically modified seeds at any point, he said.

“Some farmers might say, ‘Don’t give me rules — don’t tell me I can’t plant something: and I look at it and say, ‘You know what, if it goes on your field and gets to mine, what right do you have to put me out of business?’

“If they’re willing to sign an affidavit saying I can sue them for contaminating my field, that’s fine. But nobody would be willing to do that”

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