

WHITEHORSE STAR

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By Tory Russell

GE Foods: Let's Take a Precautionary Approach

December 10 in the Legislature, the government responded to a petition signed by well over 1500 people calling for a moratorium on the planting of Genetically Engineered seed in the Yukon. In turning down the petitioners' request, Archie Lang, the Minister responsible for agriculture, ironically said "we will take into account the views and interests of Yukon farmers and consumers and the public".

The Minister indicates, "We will work with our federal counterparts to learn more about this technology."

If the department wants to be informed about GE seed, they must go beyond the scope of agriculture department scientists serving agribusiness.

The Report of the Royal Society of Canada's Expert Panel on the Future of Biotechnology (published February 2001) noted with concern the growing evidence of university researchers building 'unprecedented ties with industry partners' and the 'profound impact' this is having.

A scientist at Health Canada filed a grievance against a food safety gag order: Dr. Shiv Chopra, a drug inspector with the department was ordered not to speak at a community meeting on genetically engineered foods.

A few weeks ago the Yukon agriculture department invited two scientists from out of town to talk about the technology. The facilitator opened question period with the request that we NOT talk about Monsanto, the company that has a monopoly on GE seed.

It is impossible to have an informed discussion about this technology without including the corporate interests that promote it. GE technology originated from a corporation, not from a human need. Humans have been successfully feeding themselves for millennia. Agriculture did not suddenly need to be re-invented.

Starvation in our world is most often a result of poverty; macro-economic distribution systems create it. GE technology is not a sustainable agriculture; it is not helping farmers grow food for their communities. The greed behind GE technology is demonstrated by the fact that farmers cannot save seed for the next planting, they have to buy new seed each crop, and the seed is the intellectual property of Monsanto. Talk about unsustainable! African countries experiencing famine have refused aid that is GE.

GE technology has been around for eleven years or so. In that time there has been a drastic reduction in the number of seed and pesticide companies in the world. There has also been a drastic reduction in the number of family farms.

Where GE foods are labelled, consumers do not want to eat it. Where they are not labelled, as in North America, people just don't know what they are eating. GE corn, which is heavily subsidized by the American government (think billions annually), is in close to 4000 products on store shelves.

There are many concerns about the 'safety testing'.
How much of that testing is done by the companies themselves?
Is safety testing ongoing? Is it designed to detect unexpected substances arising out of the technology? How are effects being tracked through generations?

Which brings us back to the scientists, the importance of consulting independent (non-government and non-corporate) scientists.

Dr. Mae-Wan Ho, Director, Institute of Science in Society writes, "We have monitored and reviewed extensive scientific literature and empirical evidence around the world on GE crops and livestock over the past ten years, the sum total of which indicates that they may well be inherently hazardous to health and the environment."

A precautionary approach, such as the petition requested, is warranted.