



# Californians for GE-Free Agriculture

- News in Genetic Engineering -

July 21, 2008

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## Dear GE Network,

Thank you for your interest in genetic engineering as it relates to California's food and farms. Please feel free to pass this newsletter along to friends and family by using the "forward email" button at the bottom of this page. And for more information, check out the [Cal GE-Free](#) web site.

## TAKE ACTION

### Ask Your Senator to Support AB 541

AB 541 is close to becoming California's first state law protecting farmers from the hazards of genetically engineered crops. Having already passed the Assembly, it has cleared its Senate committees and is ready to be voted on by the full Senate in August. Please let your Senator know that you support this bill!

AB 541 will enact protections for California farmers against frivolous lawsuits that intimidate and harass those who have not been able to prevent the inevitable - the drift of GE pollen or seed. It will level the playing field for farmers accused by agricultural biotechnology companies and other patent holders of contract violations, and discourage the practice of biotech companies sampling crops without explicit permission from farmers and prosecuting based on unverifiable testing results.

Please write or call your Senator no later than August 8th. To get contact information for

your representative, see [LegInfo.ca.gov](http://LegInfo.ca.gov). Note that faxes or phone calls are much more effective than emails.

Please also forward this email alert to everyone you know in California to help gather support for the AB 541 support letter from organizations, businesses, and individuals. For more background on AB 541, see [Cal GE-Free](#).

**AB 541 sample support letter**  
**Please personalize for greatest impact**

[date]

The Honorable [NAME]  
[ADDRESS]  
[FAX]

RE: AB 541 (Huffman) - SUPPORT

Dear [NAME]:

I am writing in support of AB 541.  
[Describe your organization, company, or farm here if applicable].

Currently, California has no laws in place to address the issue of genetic engineering (GE), yet citizens across the state have expressed concerns about the risks the technology presents for farmers, consumers, the economy and the environment.

AB 541 is a good first step towards addressing the many issues related to genetic contamination caused by GE crops and seeds. This bill will enact protections for California farmers against frivolous lawsuits that intimidate and harass those who have not been able to prevent the inevitable drift of GE pollen or seeds. It will level the playing field for farmers accused by Monsanto and others of contract violations, and discourage their practice of sampling crops without explicit permission from farmers and prosecuting based on unverifiable test results.

I urge you to consider this issue carefully, and vote to support AB 541. It will be a vote in favor of California farmers.

Sincerely,

[name, title, organization or business]

**NEW RESOURCES**

Now available on the [Cal GE-Free web site](#) are two new fact sheets:

1. Rice Contamination Case Study - Includes a chronicle of the disastrous contamination of the Southern U.S. food supply by unapproved GE rice varieties in 2006, as well as summary of the negative consequences for rice farmers and the entire rice industry.

2. **GE Sugar Beets** - Summarizes the key issues of concern related to the pending commercial production of GE sugar beets in the U.S.

## NEWS

In recent months, two themes have been prevalent in reporting on genetic engineering in agriculture, as in other sectors of society - climate change and the food crisis. The selections in this month's newsletter highlight the debate that rages over the role of genetic engineering in responding to these crises.

### **Biotech Corporations Grabbing Genes**

The world's largest seed and agrochemical corporations are stockpiling hundreds of monopoly patents on genes in plants that the companies will market as crops genetically engineered to withstand environmental stresses associated with climate change - including drought, heat, cold, floods, saline soils, and more. [A report released in May 2008 by the ETC Group] warns that - rather than a solution for confronting climate change - the promise of so-called "climate-ready" crops will be used to drive farmers and governments onto a proprietary biotech platform.

The report says that this "corporate grab on climate-tolerant genes" means that "a handful of transnational companies are now positioned to determine who gets access to key genetic traits and what price they must pay".

According to a June 9th story done by Geoffrey Lean in the U.K.'s Independent: "Nine firms have filed at least 532 patents around the world on about 55 different genes offering protection against heat, drought and floods. If granted, the companies would be given control of crucial natural raw material needed to maintain food supplies in an increasingly hungry world."

News release available at [ETC Group](#).  
For a story on the report, see [The Independent](#).

### **Genetic Engineering - a Crop of Hyperbole**

The food crisis is much in the news. It is also on the minds of the biotech industry, which is using rising food worries to suggest, contrary to the evidence, that genetically engineered crops are needed to help the world feed itself. The recent spike in food prices is due to increased demand, drought and trade policies rather than to inadequate global production. But world population is growing, so it is worthwhile to consider the role of GE for ensuring adequate, affordable and sustainable food in the future.

After 20 years of GE research and 13 years of commercialization, GE crops have a track record that allows us to evaluate their future prospects. And so far, they have shown little progress on the biggest food production issues, such as intrinsic yield, stress tolerance and

improving sustainability. The weak performance to date raises questions about how much more of our scarce research dollars should be devoted to this controversial technology.

Moreover, the lax regulation of both food safety and environmental risks from GE also remains to be addressed, especially in developing countries that often have no regulatory infrastructure to evaluate GE crops.

Let's be clear. As of this year, there are no commercialized GE crops that inherently increase yield. Similarly, there are no GE crops on the market that were engineered to resist drought, reduce fertilizer pollution or save soil. Not one.

To read the full opinion piece by Doug Gurian-Sherman of the Union of Concerned Scientists, see [San Diego Union Tribune](#).

On a related note, Grassroots International is collecting signatures on a petition calling for real solutions to the food crisis. The petition supports food sovereignty - the right of the world's small farmers to grow for local markets and the right of consumers to gain access to healthy, local foods - and disavows free trade as the answer.

To sign, go to [Grassroots International](#).

### **International Report States GE Not the Answer to World Food Crisis**

Sixty countries backed by the World Bank and most UN bodies yesterday called for radical changes in world farming to avert increasing regional food shortages, escalating prices and growing environmental problems.

But in a move that has led to the US, UK, Australia and Canada not yet endorsing the report, the authors said GE technology was not a quick fix to feed the world's poor and argued that growing biofuel crops for automobiles threatened to increase worldwide malnutrition.

The authors of the 2,500-page International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development [IAASTD] say the world produces enough food for everyone, yet more than 800 million people go hungry. "Food is cheaper and diets are better than 40 years ago, but malnutrition and food insecurity threaten millions," they write. "Rising populations and incomes will intensify food demand, especially for meat and milk which will compete for land with crops, as will biofuels. The unequal distribution of food and conflict over control of the world's dwindling natural resources presents a major political and social challenge to governments, likely to reach crisis status as climate change advances and world population expands from 6.7 billion to 9.2 billion by 2050."

Excerpted from [The Guardian](#).

The full IAASTD report is available at [www.agassessment.org](http://www.agassessment.org)

### **Non-GM Crops Dominate in World Agriculture**

Non-GM crops bred using traditional plant breeding methods still provide most of the food and animal feed in the world, covering more than 97% of agricultural land compared with only 2.4% growing GM crops.

The GM Freeze analysis shows that in fact over 90% of global arable land is used to cultivate non-GM crops. Even in the USA, where GM crops have been widely adopted, over 85% of agricultural land is growing non-GM crops and two thirds of arable land grew non-GM crops in 2007.

For the full report, go to [GM Freeze](#).

## CORRECTION

In our March 2008 issue, we used an erroneous headline linking to our story on the development of insect resistance. Bt resistance has been discovered for the first time in insects, rather than Roundup Ready resistance. For the full story, see <http://uanews.org/node/18178>.

Thanks to an observant reader in Sonoma County for noticing this error.

## Help Build the California GE-Free Network

As one of the largest agricultural economies in the world, California has the opportunity to become a leader in safeguarding our public and private lands, fisheries, forests, schools, gardens and nurseries from GE contamination.

If GE is an issue that you are concerned about and you are not already a member, sign on to the [Cal GE-Free list serve](#) to receive this newsletter.

To make a tax-deductible donation, send a check payable to Cal GE-Free to:  
15290 Coleman Valley Rd., Occidental, CA 95465.

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