

GE crops: It's the liability

So, right now, the organic industry, which prohibits genetic engineering, is tasked with trying to find a way for organic alfalfa to co-exist with the genetically engineered variety.

The only feasible way for this to happen is if full liability is assumed by the biotech industry. GE crops inevitably contaminate organic crops with unwanted, artificial genetic material.

Anything less than full liability represents an immoral imposition of clean-up costs onto the victims of pollution. Organics lose value with genetic contamination because people buy organics to avoid such contamination.

A comparable situation would be a supposedly pesticide-free crop contaminated with pesticides by an incautious neighbor—justice would demand that the polluter pay. Anything less would represent the biotech industry playing unfairly.

These developments are unfolding, but, given the biotech industry's cavalier "screw organics" attitude thus far, there is no reason to assume they will play fairly with their GE alfalfa crops.

Watch for the unavoidable court battles as contaminated organic alfalfa farmers sue biotech polluters. The courts have been way more sympathetic to organics than the USDA, since the courts have

tended to recognize (so far) that polluters do not get a free pass.

Some folks will tell you only irrational people are against biotechnology, but science questions aside, lost markets need to be addressed by biotech boosters.

What is their solution for the farmer who loses access to the lucrative non-GE market because of genetic contamination? The only moral answer is full liability for those who introduce this market-destroying technology.

Genetic engineering is fundamentally different from the age-old practice of crossbreeding, which is as simple as getting distant cousins to produce offspring. It's accomplished on the farm, without million dollar labs.

GE involves physically forcing together completely unrelated genetic material using high technology.

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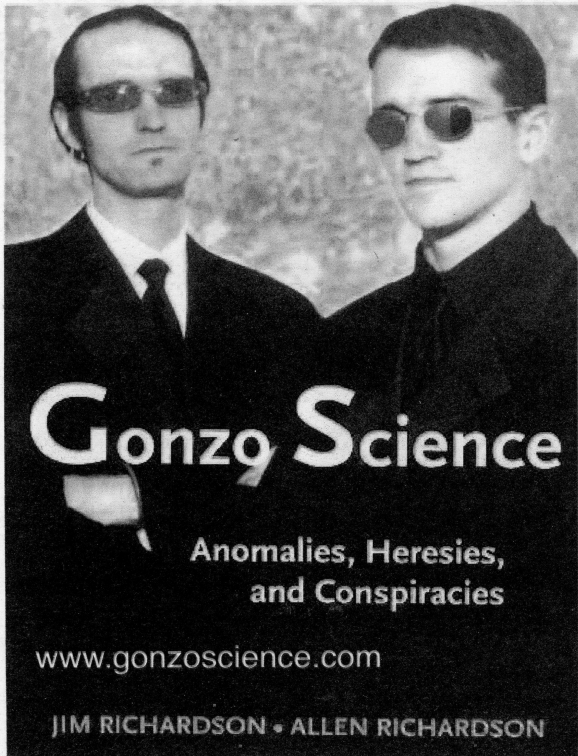
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The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has decided to deregulate genetically engineered (GE) alfalfa. Their position is farmers should be allowed to grow what they want.

NO EXIT

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GE involves physically forcing together completely unrelated genetic material using high technology.

Unlike crossbreeding, DNA must essentially be tricked or forced to accept foreign genetic structures, all of which have little-researched implications for the genetic stability of the final product, including the creation of novel viruses, release of dormant viruses, cancer promotion, and on and on.

Stay tuned because the USDA is going to try the same thing with GE sugar beets and...well, probably everything.

Perhaps the only factor that can now stop the behemoth of GE contamination will be the inexorable contamination lawsuits.

It's the liability, stupid.

The irony of the politics of this issue is that, while the USDA allows one sort of pollution, the Environmental Protection Agency is cracking down on a different set of polluters: greenhouse-producing power plants and oil refineries.

That is change we can believe in and Obama is totally an environmentalist, but every US president who has dealt with the GE issue has sucked balls, in part, because biotech companies have so many dollars to pour into spin and so many scientists buy into the myth of the industry that employs them.

So if you convene a panel of experts, they are likely to tell anyone—say, a president—that GE is harmless.

But full liability is going to haunt the nightmares of these dreamers. Once you start messing with people's access to markets...well, you're being downright un-American.

Is it reasonable to tell a victim of pollution they were making a living in the wrong market and the destruction of the market that paid them is just the new American way of doing business?

This seems to be the USDA's position. They know the pollution attendant to GE crops is uncontainable; they just think it *shouldn't matter*.

But if the reason for supporting GE crops is that farmers should be allowed to grow whatever they want, does not this logic also apply to organic and non-GE farmers too?

Why are their rights to grow genetically clean crops trumped by the rights of polluters? This is a problem the courts must wrestle with and, so far (knock on wood), the polluters have had to pay.

It's too bad the USDA insists on victimizing more farmers and ensuring additional lawsuits, but that is the only way GE and non-GE can "co-exist"—i.e., no co-existence at all.

Without a provision for full liability, the USDA's "my way or the highway" leads directly to the courthouse.

Tune in next issue when we tackle genetic engineering again—namely, why the fundamental premises of genetic engineering are falling apart. It's a little something we like to call: "The gene is dead."

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Andy Singer

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