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**national farmers union**

***In Union Is Strength***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**GM CONTAMINATION OF CANADIAN FLAX EXPORTS THREATENS  
MARKETS IN EUROPE**

The European Commission's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed has confirmed the contamination of Canadian flax exports with a genetically modified (GM) flax, devastating Canadian flax sales to Europe. The GM flax has been illegal to grow in Canada since 2001 when flax growers forced the government to take the product off the market. A German company confirmed the GM contamination in its cereals and bakery products.

The GM flax, called the "Triffid", was approved by Canadian regulators in 1998 but the Flax Council of Canada convinced the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to remove variety registration for the GM flax in 2001, making it illegal to grow. Flax growers took this action to protect their export markets from the threat of GM contamination. Approximately 70 per cent of Canada's flax is exported to Europe.

"This is an absolute nightmare for flax growers and why we worked so hard to have the GM flax removed," said Terry Boehm, a flax grower and Vice President of the National Farmers Union. "Flax growers forced the GM flax off the market eight years ago to prevent any threat of contamination and protect our export markets. GM flax was never wanted or needed. We knew it would destroy our European markets and now we fear this has happened."

At the beginning of this month, cash bids for flaxseed in Western Canada fell dramatically based on rumours of GM contamination.

"This contamination is extremely shocking as GM flax has not been grown in Canada since 2001," said Lucy Sharratt, Coordinator of the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network. "Where did this contamination come from?"

"This is a major international contamination incident that shows how dangerous any GM crop field testing and development is for farmers and consumers," said Arnold Taylor, an organic flax grower and Chair of the Organic Agriculture Protection Fund of the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate.

"Germany never approved GM flax but thanks to Canada we are eating illegal and unlicensed flax in our bread and cereal," said Stefanie Hundsdorfer from Greenpeace Germany. "This again proves that once released into nature genetically engineered constructs are uncontrollable and cannot be recalled. At least now it's clear that the industry is unable to control its products."

The GM flax was developed by controversial scientist and industry proponent Alan McHughen when he worked at the Crop Development Centre of the University of Saskatchewan. In the wake of the 2001 controversy the Centre halted its GM research.

This revelation of GM flax contamination comes right in the middle of another huge scandal over Canada's approval of Monsanto's eight-trait GE 'SmartStax' corn without any health safety assessment.

"Consumers are reeling from learning that Health Canada did not approve the new 'SmartStax' GM corn and now they find out that their flax could be contaminated," said Sharratt. "GM is out of control, we clearly need a moratorium on all new GM crops and foods until we can examine the entire system that regulates GM in Canada."

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