



NFU calls for better regulation, disclosure of test plot locations and end to open air GM crop testing following Alberta wheat contamination incident

On June 14, 2018 when the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) released information about a small patch of unapproved genetically modified wheat discovered growing on an oil rig access road in Alberta in 2017, the NFU responded quickly. In a media release, Terry Boehm, chair of the National Farmers Union Seed Committee, said “We are relieved that this GMO wheat incident was discovered and action was taken quickly to prevent contamination of Canada’s commercial wheat stocks and seed supplies. This is a close call, which we hope will not result in lost markets or lower prices for wheat.”

This incident is a reminder of the serious risk to market access and potential devastation of farmers’ incomes that have been put in motion by the CFIA when it allowed field-testing of genetically engineered crops. Back in 2001, the National Farmers Union called for an end to secret, open-air field tests of genetically engineered crops in Canada. Since 2000, the NFU has maintained that companies promoting genetically engineered crops such as Monsanto (now Bayer) must be held responsible for losses incurred by farmers as a result of contamination incidents.

“The CFIA went ahead with open-air trials, assuring farmers that their protocols for isolating genetically modified plants from the rest of agriculture were adequate. Today we see that an escape has happened, and that the regulatory process in place in the late-1990s and early 2000s did not even require biotech companies to provide the CFIA with full information about the plants they were testing,” noted Boehm.

Boehm said, “We may have dodged a bullet this time, thanks to observant and responsible workers who spotted the wheat that survived spraying with glyphosate and the civil servants who looked after testing and monitoring to ensure this is an isolated incident. But now would be a good time to stop open-air testing

of genetically modified wheat to prevent potentially more serious incidents in the future.”

On behalf of the NFU, Boehm also wrote to CFIA President Paul Glover, requesting full disclosure of the locations of all current and past open-air test plots of genetically modified wheat so farmers and others can be on the look-out for escapes, and as citizen monitors, assist in the eradication of contamination risks if additional genetically modified plants are found.

The potential impact on farmers’ livelihoods and the Canadian economy that would occur if contamination resulted in permanently closed markets is an unacceptable risk.

“We sincerely hope that the Alberta incident is isolated. How the genetically modified wheat plants ended up in the location where they were found remains a mystery. However, it is clear that the test plot protocol has been inadequate to prevent an escape,” said Boehm. “The only way to prevent these incidents happening in the future is to ban outdoor testing.”

According to the CFIA, biotech companies have done field trials of genetically modified wheat most years since 1998, including two in Ontario in 2011 and 2012, and 52 in Alberta in 2014. Monsanto did outdoor genetically modified herbicide tolerant wheat trials from 1998 through 2004. Syngenta and BASF did field testing in 2005 and 2006. For the past five years, most of the field trials have been done in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Fifty-four field trials of genetically modified wheat — including 32 by Bayer Crop Science, which has just purchased Monsanto — were carried out in Saskatchewan and Manitoba in 2017. ■

More information and links to CFIA documents about the incident are available on the NFU website at www.nfu.ca.

OP-ED:**Cereals Canada's Irresponsible GM Wheat Policy**

—by Stewart Wells

The discovery of genetically modified (GM) spring wheat plants growing in Alberta is disappointing and damaging to Canadian farmers. As is the reaction by Cereals Canada—an industry-dominated group that falsely claims to represent Canadian wheat farmers.

An article published in 2014 quotes Cereals Canada President, Cam Dahl saying, “Cereals Canada’s support for GM wheat is consistent with the policy of its member associations, which includes the Grain Growers, miller’s association and life science companies. The policy was adopted by Cereals Canada Board of Directors...” Following a GM wheat contamination incident in Oregon in 2014, Cereals Canada also signed on to a statement in support of further investment in, and commercialization of genetically modified wheat. Cereals Canada supported an irresponsible policy then, and they haven’t learned anything from Canada losing important markets now.

Escapes of genetically engineered plants and resulting market disruptions were predicted by the NFU 15 years ago and were a major reason for the NFU’s opposition to GM wheat. Japan, which was the highest priced market when the Canadian Wheat Board was marketing Canadian wheat, has stopped all shipments of Canadian wheat and flour. Others may follow. In June 2003, an NFU media release highlighted the unacceptable risks of GM wheat, calling it BSE for Grain Farmers:

“Canadian cattle producers are experiencing the devastating consequences of border closures and market losses that have resulted from BSE. At the same time, however, the Canadian government is considering the approval of the grain system equivalent of BSE: genetically-modified wheat. GM wheat will lead to massive market losses and will effectively close borders to Canadian exports. But unlike BSE—which can be rooted out and markets and borders reopened—the devastating effects of GM wheat will be permanent.”

Rather than recognize that their blind support of GM wheat has helped create today’s contamination problem, Cereals Canada and its members were quick to revert to the “it’s all safe” biotech industry mantra, which ignores the very real market problems they helped to create. And therein lies one of the central problems with Cereals Canada—on this issue, and many others, some of its Board members are in a conflict of interest. For a so-called life science company, passing up an opportunity to sell more chemicals or seed would contradict their company’s interests.

There is no question that the policies of Cereals Canada members such as the Western Canadian Wheat Growers and Grain Growers of Canada helped provide Monsanto and the government the cover they needed to seed experimental plots of GM wheat at secret and undisclosed locations 15 years ago, over the strongest objections of organizations like the National Farmers Union. (Even provincial governments were not trusted to know the locations of the plots.)

The farmer-run Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) also recognized the marketing liability that GM wheat posed. In 2003 the CWB’s media relations manager said, “Our customers are telling us they don’t want to buy GM wheat, the market is telling us they don’t want it, and we certainly haven’t seen evidence that people want it”.

The CWB stood up for the interests of Canadian farmers and our international customers who do not want GMO wheat. No doubt its firm opposition to GM wheat is another reason that members of Cereals Canada worked so hard to destroy the CWB. Clearly, Cereals Canada cannot be trusted to represent the interests of Canadian wheat farmers.

Cereals Canada has worked against the interests of farmers on other issues, as well. By continually undermining the Canadian Grain Commission, and calling for U.S. grain to freely enter Canada and be comingled with Canadian grain, Cereals Canada promotes other irresponsible policies. It would be untenable to maintain the current rail rates (MRE) if large amounts of U.S. grain were clogging up the Canadian transportation system.

Cereals Canada has recently embarked on a plan to merge with/take over the Canadian International Grains Institute (CIGI). The farmer checkoff money that helps support CIGI makes it a target that is just too good to pass up. However, with the mission statement “to be the trusted independent source for milling, quality and end-use functionality expertise for millers and end users of Canadian grain to increase market opportunities and end-user success”, CIGI does incredibly important work on behalf of Canadian farmers and it would be extremely damaging to have CIGI taking the same irresponsible policy positions endorsed by Cereals Canada. Given its track record, Cereals Canada has no right to a merger or takeover of the CIGI.

—Stewart Wells was President of the National Farmers Union from 2001 to 2009

Agroecology, Livestock and Global Warming: *how our institutions make a difference*

—by Cathy Holtslander, NFU Director of Research and Policy

Institutions such as orderly marketing, community pastures and grazing co-ops help farmers succeed when using production systems that are good for the land, the animals, our communities and the climate. By comparing scale and methods of production under different institutional arrangements we begin to see them as potential tools for mitigating (reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and adapting to climate change.

Our Supply Management system influences the scale of farms and structure of dairy, eggs, chicken, turkey and hatching eggs, allowing Canada's smaller dairy and poultry farms to remain sustainable, in contrast to sectors and countries focused on export markets, such as dairy and poultry in the USA and EU and hogs and beef in Canada. Smaller scale allows for more environmentally friendly production and lower climate impacts.

In Canada, the average dairy herd is 86 cows. Canada's largest dairy farms are in BC's heavily populated lower mainland where very high land costs promote intensive production. The largest has 3500 cows, more than twice the size of the next-largest herd. Only 12 BC dairy farms have over 700 cows. In California the average dairy farm size is 1250 cows. There are dairy farms in the USA with as many as 30,000 cows. Extreme price volatility and extended low price periods due to over-production are driving smaller US dairy farms out of business at an alarming rate.

Canadian poultry production is also on a smaller scale than in the USA. Here, the average number of chickens (broilers or hens) per farm is 6,086 and 3,132 for turkeys. In the States, 9 billion broilers are produced on 30,000 farms, averaging out to 300,000 birds per farm. Nearly all US chicken farmers operate on contract to major corporations where they have little control, high debt loads and carry all the risks. It is virtually impossible for an American commercial chicken farmer to implement environmentally-friendly practices under these circumstances.

Supply management allows for smaller scale production that makes greater use of carbon-sequestering pasture lands, uses manure for fertilizer on cropland instead of fossil-fuel based synthetic fertilizers, and is located closer to processors and consumers. Most provincial boards also encourage certified organic production through special quota allocation programs.

Canada's former single-desk hog marketing system provided market access for small producers and kept both meat-packing and retail sales local. This ended when

provinces shut down their marketing boards in support of the federal strategy to accelerate pork exports in the late 1990s.

Single-desk hog marketing did not use quotas, but still balanced supply and demand within each province. Both prices and production levels would fluctuate on an approximate four-year cycle in response to the relative price of feed to hogs, population growth, and consumer preferences. Marketing boards were governed by elected farmers. Prices were moderated by premiums and discounts for quality factors and by buffering the cyclical peaks and valleys.

After single desk hog marketing was eliminated Canada rapidly lost 60% of our hog farms, dropping from over 21,100 farms in 1996 to 11,500 a decade later. Only 8,300 exist today. At the same time, average number of hogs per farm went up from 523 to 1,732. Total production has increased less than 30% while intensification has more than tripled. The change in scale also increased the hog sector's environmental footprint. With the single-desk system we had a large number of dispersed, diversified farms where feed was grown and fed on the farm and manure used to fertilize cropland. Intensification replaced them with high-output farms that buy feed and produce more manure than can be sustainably spread on nearby land. In addition, exposure to export markets and foreign currency exchange results in price volatility that frequently triggers government safety net payouts.

Canada's federal community pasture system (PFRA Community Pastures) operated from the 1930s until 2012 when it was dismantled by the Harper government. The PFRA transitioned farms that had succumbed to the drought and depression of the 1930s into public lands that were then rehabilitated for use as pasture. Farmers could graze their cow-calf pairs on PFRA pastures over the summer. Access to community pasture allowed smaller mixed farms to remain viable, supporting rural communities.

The pastures also provided numerous public benefits. A study of the former PFRA pastures in Manitoba found "... ecological goods and services from Manitoba community pastures is valued at \$13,349,646 per year (based on a price of \$25 per tonne for CO₂). The largest components of this value are forage production and carbon sequestration, and also include soil formation,

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(*Agroecology, Livestock and Global Warming, from page 3*)

biodiversity, recreation and hunting, community development, and timber. Some components—including species at risk, pollination and long-term carbon storage—were excluded due to insufficient data or significant variation across pasture landscapes. This value therefore represents an incomplete estimate of ecological goods and services from the Manitoba community pastures studied but does incorporate major service contributions.” (*The Social and Environmental Benefits of Manitoba’s Community Pastures* – by Geoffrey Gunn, Suren Kulshreshtha, and Dimple Roy)

Grazing co-operatives are similar to community pastures, but governed by members instead of a federal program. Most grazing co-operatives use leased public lands for pastures. They hire grazing managers to manage the pasture and look after the cattle during grazing season. Cattle are returned to individual farmers for the winter.

The public conversation about agriculture and climate changes tends to focus on the impacts of market-based carbon pricing measures or direct regulation of emitters. The climate benefits that are—or could be—provided through institutional arrangements such as supply management, single desk marketing and community pasture systems are worth bringing into the discussion as well. These institutions could be expanded and improved to promote widespread adoption of agro-ecological production hand-in-hand with better farmer livelihoods and greater rural prosperity. ■

Who (or what) does Cereals Canada represent?

Cereals Canada registered as a federal lobbyist under the name Cereals Council within a few weeks of the Harper government’s destruction of the farmer-directed Canadian Wheat Board. Its first interim chair was Janet Shaw, a former lobbyist for Syngenta with 20 years of involvement with CropLife Canada, the lobby group for the biotech and pesticide industry.

Cereals Canada was incorporated in 2013 with founding directors Jean-Marc Ruest (VP of Canada’s largest private grain company, Richardson International), Jay Bradshaw (President of Syngenta Canada and Chair of CropLife Canada) and Kent Erickson (then Chair of Alberta Wheat Commission).

Its eighteen-member Board of Directors is structured to have six representatives of crop development and seed companies, six for grain handling firms, exporters and processors and six for producer organizations, ensuring a 2/3 majority of votes for the corporate representatives. The current board is slightly out of compliance with the organization’s bylaws, yet maintains power in corporate hands.

Nearly half of Cereals Canada directors work for companies with head offices in other countries.

Five of the seven grain handling firm reps belong to the Western Grain Elevators Association, the lobby group for the private grain companies. All of the crop development and seed company reps belong to CropLife Canada. These corporations are already organized to serve their own interests. While Cereals Canada presents itself as a collaborative organization that involves all links in the value chain, it is structured to ensure its corporate members win every vote, regardless of which producer groups happen to be around the table.

In light of these facts, what do you think the NFU should do? ■

Cereals Canada Board	
Representing crop development and seed companies:	
Jeffrey Bertholet	BASF (head office – Germany)
Al Driver	Bayer (head office – Germany)
Jay Bradshaw	Syngenta (head office – China)
Jeff Reid	SeCan
Representing grain handling firms, exporters and processors:	
Jason Hutchinson	Grupo Bimbo (head office – Mexico)
Adam Dyck	Warburtons (head office – UK)
Brant Randles	Louis Dreyfus (head office – USA)
Darren Amerongen	Parrish & Heimbecker
Richard Wansbutter	Viterra (head office – Switzerland)
Jim Smolik	Cargill (head office – USA)
Jean-Marc Ruest	Richardson International
Representing producers:	
Henry Van Ankum	Grain Farmers of Ontario
Trevor Petersen	Alberta Wheat Commission
Robert Misko	Manitoba Wheat and Barley Growers
Joan Heath	Appointed by SK gov’t
Terry Youzwa	Appointed by SK gov’t
Kevin Bender	Alberta Wheat Commission
Drew Baker	Manitoba Wheat and Barley Growers