

GENETICALLY MODIFIED WHEAT

A THREAT TO MONTANA WHEAT FARMERS



Genetically modified (GM) wheat is not approved anywhere in the world.

Approval of GM wheat would devastate wheat farming in Montana.

The bulk of our hard red spring and white winter wheat is grown for export. Foreign and domestic buyers of our wheat have said that they will not buy GM wheat. Their customers reject products made with GM ingredients, so grain buyers will not risk purchasing wheat that might contain even trace amounts of GM material. If we grow any GM wheat in the U.S., foreign buyers, including Japan, have expressed they will look to other nations like Australia and Ukraine that guarantee GM-free wheat. Despite the risk to wheat producers, biotech companies like Monsanto and Syngenta are pursuing commercialization of GM wheat.

Landmark market studies by Dr. Robert Wisner and Dr. Neal Blue, commissioned by the Western Organization of Resource Councils in 2003 and 2010, found that farmers could lose 50% of U.S. hard red spring wheat export market with the introduction of GM wheat—and even higher export losses for durum wheat. These studies found that our buyers would find other wheat, and in turn American wheat prices would drop by a third, plummeting farm revenue. In 2014, Montana will export 80% of our wheat, and market disapproval remains strong.

What's at stake in Montana?

- 80% of Montana's wheat grown for export
- Montana's #1 commodity
- Montana's 8,950 wheat farms
- A \$1.7 billion wheat industry



U.S. wheat exports by country, in Million Metric Tons, 5 year average.
Photo: U.S. Wheat Associates

Farmers cannot save and replant GM wheat seeds

Farmers don't buy or own GM seeds; they must sign a technology use agreement with Monsanto or other companies to use the patented technology contained in the seeds. These agreements prohibit farmers from saving or selling seeds, a time-honored tradition, forcing them to purchase seeds every year. Monsanto's technology use agreement limits the company's liability and imposes stiff fines – on farmers and neighbors – for violations of the agreement. In the past 15 years, Monsanto sued 150 farmers and threatened hundreds more; all but 11 farmers have been forced to settle rather than face Monsanto at trial.

Grassroots pressure stopped Monsanto's GM wheat in 2004

From 2000 to 2004, farmers and consumers with Northern Plains Resource Council organized across the state and around the world to protect the economy and environment of the Northern Great Plains against the introduction of GM wheat. Under farmer and grassroots pressure, Monsanto announced in 2004 that it was shelving research and development of GM wheat. In 2011, though, Monsanto resumed outdoor testing GM wheat on hundreds of acres in North Dakota and Hawaii, and soon Montana. The biotech industry aims to gain approval for commercial GM wheat within ten years, despite foreign market rejection of GM wheat remaining strong.

Even small incidents of GM contamination hurt our market

In 2013 an Oregon white wheat contamination caused rejected shipments in Japan and South Korea, causing millions of dollars in damages to American farmers. With international tolerance for genetic traits in wheat at zero percent (other GM crops are allowed to contain trace amounts of GM material), a contamination event has severe economic consequences. Contamination can occur during many stages of wheat's agricultural cycle and its commercial path to market: planting, cultivation, harvesting, transporting, cleaning, storing, and processing. It can be caused by seed impurities, wind, cross-pollination by insects, transport by birds or water, by volunteers (plants growing from the previous year's crop), or inadequate harvesting and handling practices. Introducing GM wheat anywhere in the U.S. dramatically raises the risk of contamination and will send foreign buyers looking for markets they can trust for GM-free wheat.

Problems with GM wheat

- GM wheat is a direct threat to Montana's wheat market
- Wheat infrastructure would require dramatic changes if GM wheat were introduced.
- Technology Use Agreements bar farmers from saving or selling GM seeds.
- Farmers use Roundup to kill unwanted wheat, so Roundup resistance is not desirable for farmers

Keep informed!
Take action!
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Northern Plains Resource Council is a conservation and family agriculture group that organizes Montana citizens to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

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