

Monsanto's GE alfalfa gets USDA green light

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On January 27, Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack announced the USDA's [decision](#) to de-regulate Monsanto's genetically engineered (GE) alfalfa, allowing it to be grown anywhere and placing both organic and conventional farmers at risk. "We in the farm sector are dissatisfied but not surprised at the lack of courage from USDA to stop Roundup Ready alfalfa and defend family farmers," said Pat Trask, a conventional alfalfa grower and plaintiff in litigation to prevent planting of GE alfalfa.

Last December, Vilsack brought together stakeholders from an array of biotech, organic and non-GE positions to discuss how they could co-exist harmoniously, but no final decisions were reached. Michael Sligh of the [National Organic Coalition](#) responded to Thursday's announcement:

We appreciate the measures that the Secretary has announced to explore ways to develop the science to protect organic and other non-GE alfalfa farmers from contamination. However, to institute these measures after the GE alfalfa is deregulated defies common sense. Logically, efforts to develop the science of preventing GMO contamination should precede, not follow, any decision to deregulate GE crops.

In a lawsuit brought forward by the Center for Food Safety in 2007, a federal court ordered the planting of Monsanto's Roundup Ready alfalfa to be halted immediately pending a full environmental impact report. In Spring 2010, the USDA released its draft Environmental Impact Statement, sparking over 200,000 public comments largely in opposition of GE alfalfa, criticizing their report. Vilsack, a long time [supporter of the biotech industry](#), has once again demonstrated that corporate influence trumps sound science as well as concerns from farmers and the public.

Best selling food system author Michael Pollan summarized reactions of some 1,000 attendees at the [Ecological Farming Association](#), meeting in Pacific Grove, California:

It's hard to understand why the Obama Administration would put the organic industry at risk

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for the sake of an unnecessary and soon-to-be-obsolete product like Roundup Ready alfalfa. This is a bad solution to a problem that doesn't exist, since 93 percent of alfalfa hay is grown without any herbicide at all.

The [Center for Food Safety](#) has already filed a lawsuit against the de-regulation decision. PAN will keep a close eye on developments as we join our allies to get GE alfalfa once again taken off the market.

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