Will USDA act on GMO contamination?

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Following news Friday that the US Department of Agriculture had discovered contamination of Washington alfalfa crops by their genetically engineered (GE, or GMO) counterparts, the agency is weighing whether to take any action. The agency's decisions is especially relevant as Washington voters will decide in November on whether genetically engineered foods, derived from GE crops, should be labeled.

In response to the news, PAN's Senior Scientist Marcia Ishii-Eiteman released the following statement:

> "The contamination of non-GE alfalfa by Monsanto's Roundup Ready GE alfalfa was predicted years ago. As a result of Monsanto's aggressive promotion of GE alfalfa, and USDA's seeming indifference to risks, that prediction has come true. Conventional and organic farmers are now facing a potentially catastrophic global market reaction to the news that the Washington alfalfa crop has been contaminated with genetically engineered alfalfa — following so soon after the GE wheat contamination incident in Oregon disrupted U.S. exports of that crop.
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> And yet USDA is still pondering whether or not to take any action, while tossing out weak excuses that since the contaminating GE alfalfa is legal, the agency might just 'let the marketplace handle it.' Who will bear the brunt of USDA's head-in-the-sand response to this disaster? Washington alfalfa farmers, the state's agricultural economy, dairy and livestock ranchers seeking non-GE feed? It's past time for USDA to wake up and put the concerns of U.S. family farmers and ranchers above those of the Big 6 pesticide/biotech corporations."

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