

Ojai Valley Green Coalition Proposition 37 Editorial Part 3

The Royal Society of Canada has described substantial health worries linked to genetically modified (GM) crops and “a range of collateral changes in expression of other genes, changes in the pattern of proteins produced, and/or changes in metabolic activities.” In other words, they are seeing evidence that the inserted genes are having unintended consequences that are troubling and need further study.

Even in 1992, FDA scientists evaluating GMOs described potential consequences. They acknowledged the possibility of unexpected, accidental changes in GM plants that may lead to higher concentrations of plant toxicants, increased naturally occurring toxins, and toxins which may produce allergens, carcinogens, or substances inhibiting assimilation of nutrients.

An excerpt from the 1992 FDA Statement of Policy gives a perfect example of where labeling of genetically modified (GM) food would illuminate possible life-threatening dangers to the public: “Examples of foods that commonly cause an allergenic response are milk, eggs, fish, crustaceans, mollusks, tree nuts, wheat, and legumes (particularly peanuts and soybeans). The sensitive population is ordinarily able to identify and avoid the offending food. However, if the allergen were moved into a variety of a plant species that never before produced that allergen, the susceptible population would not know to avoid food from that variety.”

Another concern is the safety of a protein created in lab plants once it is transferred into a new species out in the field. Some naturally occurring proteins in potatoes are slightly toxic, but when combined into a new genetically modified organism (GMO) became highly poisonous. According to The Institute for Responsible Technology this has already happened in another GM food crop, GM peas, previously under development, which were destroyed before being commercialized. In the confines of the lab farms this can be controlled, out in the field not so much.

Another concern expressed by FDA scientists was that GM plants might gather “toxic substances from the environment” such as “pesticides or heavy metals,” or that toxic substances in GM animal feed might bio-accumulate into milk and meat products as they move up the food chain. No studies followed.

Herbicide use and herbicide residues have increased with GMO crops. The higher residue levels have caused many countries to increase their legally allowable levels—by up to 50 times—in order to accommodate the introduction of GM crops. USDA statistics show herbicide use accelerating, up by 383 million pounds in the first 13 years after the introduction of GM crops, and along with it increasing numbers of herbicide resistant weeds.

Nearly one million Californians signed the petition to get the initiative, CA Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act, on the ballot. If it succeeds, the required

"Genetically Modified" label will be prominent on the front or side of all food packaging sold in California. (It will not be included in the nutrient label, because of a previous court challenge launched by the industry claiming the ingredient label on food packages is the purview of the federal government, not the states.)

For more information go to:

<http://www.carighttoknow.org>

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/GuidanceDocuments/Biotechnology/ucm096095>

The Coalition thanks main author and researcher, Linda Harmon, with assistance from Bill Haff, Jan Dietrick and Ron Whitehurst, for this series. To learn more or to help with the campaign locally, contact Bill at bill.haff@gmail.com. We encourage readers to attend our September 1 film event and Proposition 37 campaign rally at the Ojai Theatre. Visit www.ojavalleygreencoalition.org for more information.