

Place an immediate moratorium on the growing of all pharmaceutical drug crops

Mike Johanns, Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns,

I am writing to express my profound concern over the United States Department of Agriculture's policy that allows food crops to be used to create genetically engineered pharmaceutical drugs and industrial chemicals.

In November 2002, it was widely reported that the biotech company ProdiGene had twice violated USDA guidelines established to prevent the contamination of the human food supply. The end result was that biotech pharmaceutical corn contaminated food crops, and more than \$2 million worth of soybeans and 155 acres of corn had to be destroyed.

The Biotech Industry Organization (BIO) and the Grocery Manufacturers of America (GMA) apparently disagree over what would constitute an effective safety policy regarding these controversial pharmaceutical biotech plants. However, both seem to agree that current USDA policy is inadequate to prevent the contamination of the human food supply.

BIO wants to restrict several large food producing states from growing these crops, while the GMA wants only non-food crops to be used to produce these drugs. Of the two, I prefer GMA's position. But I question whether even non-food crops should be used to produce such pharmaceutical drugs and industrial chemicals. Genetic modification of plants is a new science and genuine risks exist for genes to move from non-food crops to food crops. Horizontal gene transfer has been shown to occur in open fields of canola resulting in the creation of "superweeds" that have become herbicide-resistant.

I ask that an immediate moratorium be placed on the growing of all pharmaceutical drug crops that use agricultural plants to produce them. Clearly, more research needs to be done before we risk additional contamination of the human food supply.

In closing, I would like to remind you that genetically engineered StarLink corn not approved for human consumption was found to have contaminated the human food supply a few years ago. The StarLink fiasco was a "Three Mile Island-type" of crisis in that only minor damage was done. Are we waiting for the equivalent of a "Chernobyl-type" of catastrophe or worse to occur in the food supply before we realize that the current USDA regulations for genetically engineered crops are inadequate?

Please write me back on this matter. Thank you!

Sincerely,

(signature)

(print name)

(address)

(city, state, zip)