



# Californians for GE-Free Agriculture

- News in Genetic Engineering -

September 29, 2008

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## Dear GE Network,

Thank you for your interest in genetic engineering as it relates to California's food and farms. Please feel free to pass this newsletter along to friends and family by using the "forward email" button at the bottom of this page. And for more information, check out the [Cal GE-Free](#) web site.

## VICTORY ON AB 541 !

Thanks to support from many of you, California's first state bill to address the many issues raised by genetic engineering has become law! On Saturday Sept. 27, Governor Schwarzenegger signed AB 541. The bill that had been introduced early in 2007 with much more comprehensive provisions. Due to powerful opposition led by California Farm Bureau, its author (Assemblymember Jared Huffman) and sponsors (the Genetic Engineering Policy Project) began the arduous task of negotiation and compromise that so often characterizes the legislative process.

The press release announcing this victory is below. The bill is one of only a handful of states that have any restrictions on GE whatsoever. Of the other three that address farmer liability protections (Indiana, North Dakota and South Dakota), California's provides the broadest protections.

For more background on the original version of AB 541 - which its supporters remain committed to - please refer to the [Cal GE-Free web site](#) or the [Genetic Engineering Policy Alliance web site](#).

You can also review a copy of the [final version of AB 541](#).

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For Immediate Release

CALIFORNIA'S FIRST PROTECTIONS FOR FARMERS FROM THREATS OF  
GENETIC ENGINEERING BECOME LAW  
Monsanto's intimidation tactics no longer legal

Sept. 29, 2008 - A landmark piece of legislation protecting California's farmers from liability was signed by Governor Schwarzenegger on Sept. 27, 2008. The bill, AB 541 (Huffman, D-Marin/Sonoma), was sponsored by a coalition of agriculture organizations and food businesses, and it is the first bill passed by the California legislature that brings much-needed regulation to genetically engineered (GE) crops.

AB 541 indemnifies California farmers who have not been able to prevent the inevitable - the drift of GE pollen or seed onto their land and the subsequent contamination of non-GE crops. Currently, farmers with crops that become contaminated by patented seeds or pollen have been the target of harassing lawsuits brought by biotech patent holders, most notoriously Monsanto. Further, if their contaminated crops cause harm to other farmers, the environment or consumers, they have not been protected from that liability. AB 541 provides protections for farmers from such liability. The bill also establishes a mandatory crop sampling protocol to level the playing field when biotech companies investigate alleged patent or contract violations.

AB 541 was sponsored by a thirteen-member coalition including Community Alliance with Family Farmers, Earthbound Farm, California Certified Organic Farmers, and United Natural Foods Inc. It also had the support of the California Farm Bureau Federation which has traditionally opposed any restrictions or regulations for GE crops.

"AB 541 provides much needed protection for farmers who typically lack the resources to fight lawsuits brought by biotech conglomerates," stated Renata Brillinger, director of the Genetic Engineering Policy Project, the coalition sponsoring AB 541. "This is a good first step towards establishing that Monsanto - not farmers - is legally responsible for the economic, environmental and health harms caused by their patented and uncontrollable products."

Contact: Renata Brillinger, (707) 874-0316, [info@gepolicyproject.org](mailto:info@gepolicyproject.org)

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#### GENETIC ENGINEERING POLICY PROJECT

California Certified Organic Farmers · California Church IMPACT ·  
Center for Food Safety · Center for Environmental Health ·  
Community Alliance with Family Farmers · Earthbound Farm ·  
Ecological Farming Association · Environment California · Good Earth Natural Foods ·  
Occidental Arts & Ecology Center · Oakland Institute · Ocean Beach People's Organic  
Food Co-op · Pesticide Action Network North America · United Natural Foods, Inc.

## SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY TEACH-IN & PUBLIC DEBATE

On November 13th, there will be two events in San Francisco on the topic of synthetic biology, ("extreme genetic engineering"), a new industry attempting to re-program living organisms to produce industrial products such as biofuels and bioplastics. To indicate your interest in either, email [Synbio@etcgroup.org](mailto:Synbio@etcgroup.org) to receive more details (e.g., agenda, confirmed speakers, venue) as soon as they are available. Places may be limited.

**One day Teach-In on Synthetic Biology - The Bay Area's Next Bio-Bubble?  
November 13th from 9:00 to 5:00 in San Francisco (location TBD)**

This teach-in is held by and for civil society groups. We will examine the implications of

Synthetic Biology for existing civil society campaigns, such as campaigns on agrofuels, clean production, energy, forests, sustainable agriculture and environmental justice. A leading practitioner in the field will join us for an overview of synbio basics. Leading critics will lead discussions on synbio's prospects and implications.

Topics will include:

- Next generation biofuels: a false solution? (including implications for agricultural and forest sustainability)
- Security: Does Synthetic Biology enable cheap, DIY bioweapons?
- Safety: The environmental and human safety implications of synthetic life-forms
- Privatization: Patenting and commodification of life's building blocks
- Biopiracy: How DNA synthesis may increase the theft of natural resources from the global South
- Justice: What the next bio-bubble could mean for environmental justice and other struggles for justice

Speakers will include: Dr. Ignacio Chapela (UC Berkeley), Dr. Drew Endy (Stanford University), Alice Friedemann (Science Writer), Pat Mooney (ETC Group)

Co-hosted by Center for Food Safety, ETC Group, Friends of the Earth USA, International Center for Technology Assessment, The SmartMeme Project, Center for Environmental Health and Alliance for Humane Biotechnology.

**Public Debate on Synthetic Biology**  
**November 17th at 7:30pm, Cowell Theater at Fort Mason Center**

Professor Drew Endy of Stanford University (one of the founders of the field of Synthetic Biology) will debate Jim Thomas of the ETC Group exploring the long-term promise and perils of Synthetic Biology.

**Background on Synthetic Biology**

This new biotech revolution born in the San Francisco Bay Area was at the heart of the recent controversial deal between UC Berkeley and oil giant BP.

Building artificial life forms may sound like science fiction, but it couldn't be more real for the investment and tech communities in the Bay Area. They tout "synthetic biology" as the next big tech revolution to come out of the Bay Area. Synthetic biologists are already attracting billions of dollars in corporate funding from energy, chemical and grain processing giants - including DuPont, BP, Shell, Chevron, Cargill and ADM - as well as venture capital and government grants. The San Francisco Bay Area, including Silicon Valley, is home to most synbio activity and is considered "ground zero" for global developments.

Synthetic organisms pose new safety risks to health and the environment. If industry succeeds in applying them to biofuel (agrofuel) production, they will have a huge impact on farm and forest economies.

**NEWS**

**Non-GE Soybeans Offer High Yields at Lower Cost**  
 University of Missouri, Sept. 8, 2008

Conventional soybean varieties are making a comeback. Lower seed and weed-control costs, price incentives at the grain elevator and yields that rival Roundup Ready beans have renewed interest in conventional varieties, said Grover Shannon, an agronomist at the University of Missouri Delta Research Center in the Missouri Bootheel.

In the 1990s, Monsanto introduced soybeans and other plants genetically modified to tolerate its popular herbicide Roundup (glyphosate). "Now there's a resurgence of interest in conventional soybean varieties. Farmers can grow them cheaper and they will yield just as well," Shannon said.

Overseas demand for non-genetically-modified soybeans and the tripling of costs for glyphosate herbicide have made conventional varieties more appealing to many growers, he said.

"Roundup costs went from about \$15 per gallon last year to \$40 to \$50 per gallon," he said. "That was a pretty good shock to growers. So they got to comparing things, and saw the conventional system was just as cheap."

Many farmers already add a conventional herbicide to glyphosate for weed control due to the spread of glyphosate-tolerant weeds, Shannon said. "The conventional herbicide systems are about as cheap if not cheaper than using just the Roundup system."

Reflecting overseas demand, grain elevators have been offering a premium for conventional soybeans. Last winter, growers could go to some of the local elevators and get a contract for non-genetically-modified soybeans for a dollar or more over the Chicago price, he said.

Another draw is the ability to save seed from conventional varieties, Shannon said. With the proprietary Roundup Ready soybeans, farmers must purchase new seed each year.

"The fact is, if a grower grows conventional beans, he can save seed to plant the next year, and then he's not out the seed costs. That's the way all farmers used to do it," he said. "But with Roundup Ready beans, he's got to pay \$40 or more for a bag each year."

Story excerpted from: [University of Missouri](#)

### **Farmers oppose GM potatoes**

Business Report, September 17 2008

The proposed commercial release of a genetically modified (GM) spud in South Africa has become something of a hot potato as farmers and some major food giants say they will not use them.

Potato SA, which represents potato farmers, has written to the department of agriculture saying the potential costs, particularly of consumer backlash and possible loss of exports, outweigh the potential benefits.

This is the first time organised agriculture has opposed the introduction of a GM crop in South Africa.

The submission is in response to a permit application by the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), which has been working with Michigan State University to develop tuber moth-resistant potatoes with funding from USAid.

Owen Porteus, managing director of McCain Foods, the biggest producer of frozen

potato products globally, said all the company's products were GM-free. "We're very much driven by consumer needs and they don't want GM."

Story excerpted from: [Business Report](#)

### Help Build the California GE-Free Network

As one of the largest agricultural economies in the world, California has the opportunity to become a leader in safeguarding our public and private lands, fisheries, forests, schools, gardens and nurseries from GE contamination.

If GE is an issue that you are concerned about and you are not already a member, sign on to the [Cal GE-Free list serve](#) to receive this newsletter.

To make a tax-deductible donation, send a check payable to Cal GE-Free to:  
15290 Coleman Valley Rd., Occidental, CA 95465.

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