

## **AB 541, the State GE Bill, Slated for Committee Hearing**

California has no state policy in place regarding agricultural genetic engineering (GE). In the absence of a state framework, eight counties in 2004 through 2006 attempted to pass local laws restricting GE crops, four of which became local law.

Then, in 2005, state legislation was proposed that would prohibit all local GE laws. In effect, this would have codified a policy of California having no protections at all regarding GE. Widespread opposition (thanks to many of you!) forced the bill to be withdrawn in 2006.

In response to these developments, and in an attempt to provide a statewide solution for the controversial issues involved, Assembly Member Jared Huffman (D-Marin) introduced AB 541 early in 2007. The bill would accomplish four things:

1. Establish a statewide system that GMO producers and researchers report the locations of GE production to the county Agriculture Commissioner. Currently the state has no information on the locations of any GE crops.
2. Require that food crops genetically engineered to produce pharmaceutical drugs would be contained in greenhouses in an effort to minimize contamination of food.
3. Establish that economic harm caused by the genetic contamination is the responsibility of the GE crop manufacturer, not farmers.
4. Protect innocent farmers who have been contaminated from patent infringement lawsuits by GE manufacturers.

AB 541 sailed through its first committee, Assembly Judiciary, with a vote of 7 to 3. It was then tabled in the Agriculture Committee, and will be heard again by that committee on January 16<sup>th</sup>. If you haven't already submitted a letter of support, we urge you to do so by January 11<sup>th</sup>. The Agriculture Committee is the most significant hurdle, and those members need to hear from you!

Please refer to [http://www.gepolicyalliance.org/action\\_alert\\_01\\_08\\_support\\_ab541.htm](http://www.gepolicyalliance.org/action_alert_01_08_support_ab541.htm) for more information and a sample letter.

## **Rice on Canadian store shelves contaminated**

An independent investigation by Greenpeace has found rice sold in Canadian supermarkets to be contaminated with an experimental, genetically engineered variety accidentally released into the environment. Greenpeace is demanding that all long grain rice imported from the United States be removed from store shelves in Canada after independent testing confirmed that rice purchased at two supermarkets in Vancouver and Montreal was contaminated with a variety of genetically engineered rice not approved for human consumption by Health Canada.

"There are no assurances that this genetically engineered rice is safe for people to eat," said Josh Brandon, agriculture campaigner with Greenpeace. "Even if genetically engineered food was labelled, which it isn't anywhere in Canada, we would not know about the presence of this variety because of lax testing on the part of the authorities."

The rice entered the American food chain sometime after 2001 following field trials at nine sites in Arkansas and Louisiana conducted by Bayer, the German multinational chemical corporation, which designed the rice to tolerate its brand of herbicide. Bayer only disclosed the contamination last year.

Excerpted from: <http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/December2007/17/c3665.html>

### **Jose Bove on a hunger strike in France to protest gene-altered crops**

The militant French sheep farmer Jose Bove and as many as 15 of his supporters were expected to begin a hunger strike Thursday aimed at raising pressure on the French government to impose a long-term ban on growing genetically modified crops.

In a newspaper interview published Wednesday, the anti-globalization activist vowed not to eat again until a ban was in place.

Bove captured worldwide attention for helping to organize the ransacking of a McDonald's restaurant nine years ago to protest the influence of multinational corporations. Since then he has served time in a French prison for damaging gene-altered crops.

While his campaigns have struck a sympathetic chord in many parts of France and Europe where gene-altered foods are widely mistrusted - and where Bove is something of a folk hero - the latest protest against altered crops comes as divisions over the potential benefits of the technology appear to be deepening across the region.

In October, the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, disappointed supporters of a long-term ban by announcing a temporary freeze on genetically modified seeds pending the outcome of a review of the technology that is expected early this year.

Bove has said he is undertaking his hunger strike to push the French government into making a much longer-term commitment to end seed cultivation.

Excerpted from: <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/01/02/europe/gmo.php>