

Alberta Forage Industry Network (AFIN) Position on GM Alfalfa

The Alberta Forage Industry Network recognizes the merits of Genetically Modified (GM) herbicide tolerant alfalfa varieties to the forage industry as a tool to manage weeds.

However, AFIN's position on the issue is to oppose the introduction of the genetics into the Western Canadian growing region. We must emphasize that we are not against the technology, however rationalize that GM alfalfa not be allowed in Western Canada for the following reasons:

1. Forage Export is a significant contributor to the Agricultural economy in Alberta. Many importing jurisdictions have strict regulations not to import ANY GM agricultural products. Until such time as these countries allow GM technology in imported agricultural products we need to keep the genetics out of Western Canada.
2. It would be a significant detriment to the export of not only hay products, but forage seed exports as well, worth over \$1.6 billion since 1998 (Stats Canada, 2008 figure).
3. Alfalfa often grows outside of planted fields in ditches and fencerows as "feral" populations; there is growing concern that the GM characteristics could be spread from feral individuals to non-GM alfalfa stands.
4. Alfalfa is a perennial species that is cross pollinated by insects the GM traits could easily be transferred to from GM to non-GM plants.

During the recent Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMD&C) a resolution was passed requesting Alberta Agriculture and Forestry and Canadian Food Inspection Agency work with service boards, marketing groups and Forage Genetics Canada (the company with the rights to GM alfalfa) to prevent the introduction of GM alfalfa "until such time there is a marketplace and consumer acceptance in Alberta's export markets, including China, Japan, the European Union and the Middle East"- Western Producer March 24, 2016.

Seed producers from all parts of Alberta are also very concerned about the introduction of GM alfalfa. A quotation from the President of Forage Seed Canada..."We're not about anti-technology, anti-GMO, anti-increases or improvement, until the world catches up we do not want to develop and contaminate alfalfa in Alberta, we need to wait until there is global acceptance of the GM product."

Obviously this issue is of particular concern to Exporter (hay and seed) AFIN members who have cultivated relationships globally providing product free of the GM herbicide tolerant traits. The fact that their exports "may" contain the genetics would jeopardize those markets.

There could also be some positives by not allowing GM alfalfa into Western Canada/Alberta, the ability to market exports as "GM Alfalfa Free" to importers could be a niche and a market standard for export products.

AFIN endorses no GM herbicide tolerant alfalfa genetics introduced to Western Canada/Alfalfa.

This position will be reviewed every 3 years as a way to reevaluate changing market impacts.

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