Farmers in Vermont are facing an economic crisis. More than 10,000 family owned farms existed a few decades ago; now there are less than 2000. This number will continue to shrink unless we find ways to support farmers for the long term. Genetically engineered crops will not improve the situation for farmers. The best advantage for Vermont farmers is our reputation for producing quality foods. Our maple syrup, our cheeses, and our organic specialty products are internationally known. If Vermont were to become the first state to declare itself free of genetically engineered crops, our farmers would have an immediate advantage in the food market, both across the U.S. and worldwide.

Please vote yes as a first step toward a GE-Free Vermont.

For more information on genetic engineering, contact:

Institute for Social Ecology Biotechnology Project
(802) 454-7138
info@nerage.org www.nerage.org

Vermont Genetic Engineering Action Network
(802) 223-0770
vtgean@sover.net

Rural Vermont
(802) 223-7222
ruralvt@sover.net

Windham County Genetic Engineering Action Network
(802) 874-4770
wickers@sover.net

Town Meeting and Genetic Engineering: Why a Resolution?

Genetic engineering (GE) is a disruptive and uncertain new technology that forces genetic material (DNA) from various bacteria, viruses, plants and animals into the living cells of the food plants that we eat. Unlike typical breeding methods that cross closely related plants, or animals of the same species, to create new varieties, genetic engineering combines genetic material from completely unrelated organisms, with consequences that can never be fully predicted.

What kinds of GE crops are grown in Vermont?

The first genetically engineered crop to be widely tried in Vermont is a corn variety engineered to make its own pesticide. “Bt corn” produces a protein normally found only in *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) bacteria; this highly activated pesticide protein is deadly to many kinds of caterpillars and worms—ones that harm crops, as well as ones that are beneficial, like the infant stages of many butterflies. Though the corn and the bacteria could never breed in the wild, scientists have developed techniques that allow them to do this in the lab.

Another, even more common type of genetically engineered crops is able to resist certain kinds of weed killing chemicals (herbicides). This allows farmers to spray more herbicides on their cornfields without killing the crops. Many farmers are spraying more and more chemicals over time, as weeds develop resistance to these herbicides. Our food may contain higher amounts of chemicals, since farmers are now able to spray mature plants with herbicides that used to simply kill them.

Are GE foods harmful to health?

Many scientists are concerned that genetic engineering will cause new allergic reactions from our food. In the fall of 2000, a genetically engineered Bt corn variety called “Starlink” was discovered in a wide variety of food items, even though it was believed to cause severe allergies and was never approved for human consumption.

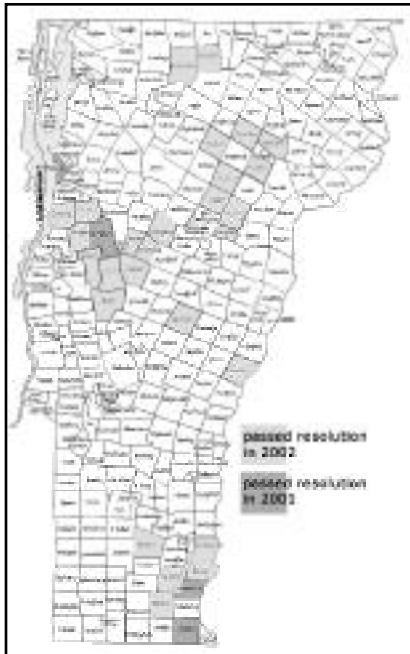
Hundreds of products were found to contain traces of “Starlink” corn, forcing a huge recall of processed foods in the United States. Last fall, the FDA discovered that corn genetically engineered to produce a pharmaceutical drug for pigs had been shipped to a Nebraska grain elevator; half a million bushels of grain had to be destroyed to keep grain contaminated with this drug-laden GE corn out of our food supply.

Genetically engineered foods can also make disease bacteria more resistant to antibiotics, and may disrupt our digestion, immune response and other important functions. We expect agencies like the Food and Drug Administration to protect us from serious food safety hazards, but in the case of GE foods, there are no required safety tests beyond those voluntarily performed by the biotech seed producers themselves.

Are GE crops good for farmers?

Seed dealers tell farmers that genetically engineered crops are cheaper and easier to grow. Yet, for farmers who already face serious economic hardship, genetically engineered crops usually increase their operating costs over time. Genetically modified seeds cost much more than conventional seed (except for special discounts offered to farmers to get them interested), they can never be saved for the next season due to a technology licensing agreement that farmers must sign, and they lock farmers into to using increasing amounts of name brand herbicides. Chemical weed killers like Roundup are made by the very same companies, such as Monsanto, that develop genetically engineered seeds.

Family farmers are facing harder and harder times due to falling prices for milk and other basic foods. While genetically engineered crops are being sold as a savior for farmers, they do nothing to improve the prices that farmers are getting for their crops, and bring additional long-term risks that today’s struggling farmers cannot easily afford. In many parts of the country, and in Canada as well, farmers have been sued by chemical and seed companies for unwittingly violating the detailed licensing agreements that come with all GE seed varieties.



In 2002, 28 towns in Vermont passed resolutions against genetic engineering. Of the 48 municipalities in the United States, Vermont is home to 33. Vermont could easily become the first state to end the planting of genetically engineered crops on a town by town basis.

Vermont Towns With Resolutions Against Genetically Engineered Crops
Bristol, Brookline, Burlington, Calais, Charlotte, Dummerston, Fayston, Greensboro, Guiford, Hinesburg, Jamaica, Lincoln, Marlboro, Marshfield, Monkton, Montgomery, Montpelier, Moretown, Newfane, Norwich, Plainfield, Putney, Randolph, Ripton, Starksboro, Waitsfield, Walden, Warren, Westfield, Westminster, Wheelock, Wolcott, Woodbury

Massachusetts
Boston, Gill, Wendall, Heath, Leverett and Buckland

Other Municipalities in the US:
West Hollywood,CA , San Francisco, CA, St. Paul, MN, Minneapolis, MN, Austin, TX, Boulder, CO, Ann Arbor, MI, Cleveland, OH

Are there other environmental problems too?

Genetically engineered crops don’t only grow in the fields where they are planted. Because plants breed through pollen, it is easy for genetically engineered crops to pollinate the fields around them. This poses a problem for both conventional and organic farmers — as well as home gardeners growing sweet corn — as their crops may be contaminated by neighboring genetically engineered varieties. Genetically engineered varieties of canola, a plant in the mustard family, can contaminate non-crop plants, especially wild mustards. Monarch butterflies, ladybugs, lacewings, and honeybees have been harmed by Bt corn crops, and the active Bt toxin protein can remain in the soil for many months after the crops are harvested.