

Media Backgrounder on Low Level Presence

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What is Low Level Presence?

"Low Level Presence" or LLP would allow a level of contamination, 0.1% or higher, from certain GM foods that have not been assessed for safety through Health Canada's approval process but have been approved in at least one other country, where that country's regulatory system is viewed as equivalent to Canada's and the possible application of other criteria. Low Level Presence overturns Canada's "zero-tolerance" policy towards contamination from GM foods that not approved by Health Canada.

Low Level Presence is distinguished from contamination from experimental GM foods that have not been approved in any country e.g. the accidental rendering of experimental GM pigs into animal feed from the University of Guelph in Ontario in 2002.

Which other countries have LLP?

Canada would be the first country in the world to adopt LLP for GM foods. Every country has "zero-tolerance" for contamination by GM foods that they have not approved as safe by domestic regulatory departments. In July 2011, the European Union allowed up to 0.1 percent contamination by GM grains in animal feed.

What is the Canadian government's rationale for LLP?

The grain industry operating in Canada wants other countries to establish LLP so that exports from Canada that are contaminated by GM grains are not rejected: "In the industry's view, **Canada could serve as a model to influence countries** with trade-restrictive LLP policies by adopting alternative domestic LLP policy approaches." (Agriculture Canada's Power Point on LLP)

Agriculture Canada also says that the potential for low-level presence to enter Canada is expected to increase in the future. As yet, however, no GM foods have been approved anywhere in the world that are not already approved in the US or Canada.

"If trace amounts of such unapproved genetically modified product are found in import shipments [from Canada], in a country where the genetically modified crop is not approved, often times these imports will be rejected...The unpredictability of rejection of such imports is a growing concern, given the potential economic impacts low-level presence will have on global trade." (AAFC AGRIDOC #2821497 page 5)

Canada grows 6% of all the GM food in the world (we grow GM corn, canola, soy and some white sugarbeet for sugar processing). The U.S. grows 45% of the world's GM crops (GM corn, canola, soy, white sugarbeet, cotton and a very small amount of GM papaya, squash and alfalfa). These 8 crops are the only GM foods on the market

around the world. Very few other countries grow GM crops, very few export them back to Canada.

What does CBAN Recommend?

CBAN argues that to eliminate the risk of market shutdowns, rather than establishing LLP in Canada as “a model to influence countries”, the federal government should ensure that any GM crops approved for growing in Canada are first approved by our major trading partners.ⁱ In CBAN’s submission “Low Level Presence Sacrifices Food Safety for Trade Policy: LLP is indefensible from a public health and safety standpoint” CBAN recommends the following:

1. Low Level Presence sacrifices food safety for elusive trade goals and should be rejected outright in favour of maintaining our zero-tolerance policy for unapproved GM foods.
2. The federal government should immediately place a moratorium on approving any new genetically engineered foods, crops or animals until a process of full regulatory reform and public consultation on the future of genetic engineering is completed.
3. Instead of considering LLP, Canada should also take every available step to ensure that contamination itself is not an issue. The federal government and all agencies and research institutions need to take the risk of contamination seriously and institute stronger segregation (biosafety measures) of GM commodities in order to avoid contamination.
4. The federal government needs to audit regulatory departments, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Health Canada in particular, to remove all dual mandates whereby trade considerations threaten to compromise human safety.
5. Canada needs to stop approving GM crops for growing in Canada that are not also approved in our major export markets.

What is the consultation process?

On September 7 2011 Agriculture Canada launched a targeted call for participation of “stakeholders” in a consultation over three proposals to introduce “Low Level Presence”. Consultation meetings were held October 11 Ottawa, ON; October 14 – Montreal, QC; October 24 – Toronto, ON; October 31 – Halifax, NS; November 2 – Winnipeg, MB; November 3 – Saskatoon, SK. CBAN and organic farming organizations participated in the consultations. The public was denied entry to the consultations. Agriculture Canada invited comments from stakeholders by email, by a November 25th deadline.

ⁱ In 2010, this was proposed via Bill C-474, tabled by NDP Agriculture Critic Alex Atamanenko. The Bill would have required that “an analysis of potential harm to export markets be conducted before the sale of any new genetically engineered seed is permitted” and received strong endorsement particularly from associations of alfalfa growers in Canada who see the introduction of GM alfalfa as a threat to their markets.