



Cassandra Anderson
February 8, 2011

Phil Geertson is a conventional alfalfa seed grower who has been involved in efforts to stop GE (genetically engineered) alfalfa since 2003 resulting in a Supreme Court decision in 2010 on Forage Genetics/Monsanto's GE alfalfa. Mr. Geertson began his career as a Registered Civil Engineer but later changed his life's work to farming and plant breeding in order to enjoy the outdoors. He has spent the last 30 years farming and raising many diversified crops and has been a partner in alfalfa breeding programs for 25 years. When RR (Roundup Ready) alfalfa was first proposed, Geertson realized that all alfalfa could quickly be contaminated by the Roundup Ready RR gene and that is the reason that he was the lead plaintiff against the USDA for deregulating GE alfalfa in 2005. Deregulation of GE crops means that seeds and plants may be planted without any restrictions. Geertson said that GE alfalfa will contaminate all alfalfa plants!

US Federal Judge Breyer placed a nationwide injunction against growing GE alfalfa in 2007 and Monsanto took this case all the way to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court removed the nationwide injunction against planting GE alfalfa, deeming it to be "too broad". However, GE alfalfa seeds were still illegal to plant because the Supreme Court allowed Judge Breyer's order barring planting of GE crops to stand until the USDA's final Environmental Impact Statement

was completed. The USDA completed the final Environmental Impact Statement in December 2010. The USDA announced that they deregulated GE alfalfa again for unlimited planting in January.

Geertson feels that this case will likely go back to Judge Breyer's court, because the Supreme Court remanded the case back to Breyer's court in their decision. Geertson also said that because of the bad science used by the USDA in its final Environmental Impact Statement, Judge Breyer may issue another injunction and the case will be tied up in court again. Click [here](#) for Geertson's analysis of the USDA's bad science.



Geertson also explained that alfalfa is particularly prone to contamination because it is a perennial plant (a plant that lives for more than 2 years) that can be cross pollinated by insects that travel long distances and alfalfa seeds can lie dormant in the ground for 10 to 20 years. Unlike corn, cotton and soybeans that are annuals and do not grow as feral plants in the environment and need to be planted each year, alfalfa is a perennial. Therefore, alfalfa will be permanently contaminated.

I asked Geertson if Forage/Monsanto's Roundup Ready alfalfa seeds were cheaper when they were introduced- it was surprising when he said that the RR seeds were more expensive. He said that farmers like RR seed products because they are convenient: the farmers can plant them, spray them with glyphosate (the active ingredient in Roundup) and then forget about them until harvest. There is far less labor involved in planting RR products. When Monsanto introduces a new product, they have splashy ad campaigns and farmers line up to buy the new seeds. The small independent seed growers lose sales and go out of business or get bought out. Forage Genetics/Monsanto owns 60%-70% of the alfalfa market.

Roundup herbicides lose their value after a few years because while they are effective for a few years, weeds and other plants become resistant to them. The RR technology is worthless when the commercial crop has to compete with these weeds and other plants. The crop yields are reduced and difficult to harvest; the farmers must then revert to conventional methods to control

the weeds. Some examples of this include the giant amaranth that has invaded GE corn and cotton fields; the same will true for GE sugar beets that will have to compete with red root pigweed. So, there is really no advantage to planting GE RR crops after a few seasons because weeds and other plants develop a resistance to glyphosate spray. But all of the small independent seed companies will be gone and Monsanto will own the agricultural seed industry.

Monsanto's business has declined because their patents are expiring. For instance, Geertson estimated that 60% of their RR spray market was lost to cheaper generic brands. Geertson said that Monsanto has not been bashful about charging exorbitant prices for their patented RR spray. After Monsanto's patent expired, generic glyphosate flooded the market and brought prices down dramatically.



[GM Watch](#) reports that Monsanto has raised prices for its products at a "whopping" rate in the past. For example, between 2006 to 2008, soybean seed prices rose from an average of \$32.30 to \$49.23 per bag; this calculates to a 52% increase. GM Watch further states, "Patenting also inhibits public sector research and further undermines the rights of farmers to save and exchange seeds. Monsanto devotes an annual budget of 10 million dollars to harassing, intimidating, suing - and in some cases bankrupting - American farmers over alleged improper use of its patented seeds."

Phil Geertson has grave concerns about the health safety effects of GE products that have not been tested and proven safe.

He is also concerned about contamination by GE seeds that cannot be recalled from the environment.

Mr. Geertson said that he is dismayed over the lack of accountability of large corporations and individuals who are responsible for these potential health and environmental disasters.

If the USDA is successful in neglecting valid science and deregulating plants by decree, this may result in the loss of pure food and our very lives could be at stake.

Geertson has tried to warn farmers about the adverse effects of GE products but the farm media, the most direct way to reach many farmers in his opinion, refuses to publish his articles. He believes that the reason for this is because the media collects big advertising fees from GE product producers so the publications don't want to offend their source of income. Therefore, farmers are prevented from learning about GE products that can irreparably contaminate the environment, among other things. Mr. Geertson is writing an article for farmers about the negative aspects of RR alfalfa. It may be necessary for him to get the information to the farmers by paying for advertising, probably from paid donations.

* MorphCity grants permission to reprint and share this article in its entirety. Please cite the author and provide a live link to MorphCity.com .