

**NEW BUSINESS**

**1. Genetically Engineered Free Crop Zone/Area Designation**

**B. DeGraag/D. Murphy THAT** the Board declare the Powell River Regional District a “Genetically Engineered Free Crop Area”;

**AND THAT** the Board accept the report from Chair Palmer on this subject and endorse its recommendations.

**MOTION CARRIED.**

## THE POWELL RIVER REGIONAL DISTRICT A GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FREE CROP ZONE

CHAIR, COLIN. S. PALMER

A significant number of people, especially in the local farming community, have appreciated our Regional Board declaring the Powell River Regional area a genetically engineered free crop zone. It is likely a significant number of people are not aware of its need, significance, or the implications. Such a declaration is among the first in Canada. Other declarations or even laws exist in Western Australia, and places such as California. Europe and Japan will not accept or buy many genetically engineered crops or foods.

Such a Zone means it is free of propagating, cultivating or raising genetically engineered organisms by persons, firms, or corporations. Such a Zone is not regulated at this stage, but is rather a statement of concern and support for those who wish to ensure seed supplies remain in the public domain.

This report is set against the following background. A mere dozen species of plants account for over 80% of the modern world's annual tonnage of all crops. Only a few major food plants have been domesticated in modern times. Only 14 or so animals have ever been truly domesticated. There are limited places on Earth where food crops can be grown.

The publicly owned seed supply. The present seed system in Canada has been publicly owned, but due to Canadian Government policies, the seed system could become privately owned and controlled. Patent laws, intellectual property laws, corporate tactics to support profits and shareholders, plus government policies are all combining to affect the system.

Pesticide companies are speeding up the process of controlling the seed industry along with the push for intellectual property rights, which it is claimed, are an incentive to innovate. However, the reverse is probably a truer state of affairs. Drug patent rights, for example, clearly resulted in higher prices, a lack of availability for poor countries, and are a portent of things to come with seeds and food.

Many Canadian crops are not a result of farmers taking natural wild crops and successfully domesticating them. In fact, most crops here are a result of seeds being brought from other parts of the world. A free exchange of seeds was the factor which made this possible. Farmers have been the agency for freely exchanging information on plant breeding which has resulted in Canada's agricultural diversity. Until the last few years most formal research and development in plant breeding has been left to the Canadian public sector. It has always been felt that the research is for the national economic good. The open exchange has not encouraged private development or private monopolies of seeds.

A privately owned seed supply. It is not well understood by the general public that for the last 30 years Canadian Government policy has deliberately encouraged private control of seed supply and plant breeding. The process is well advanced and explains why many farmers need public support, and why the food system is ripe for private control.

The Government, Corporations and Seeds. One of the triggers for private seed development was the intellectual property regimes in the U.S. and Europe in the 60's. Add to that biotechnology interests, and it isn't difficult to understand how the private sector saw financial opportunities. Seeds suddenly had an enormous commercial interest.

One Canadian Government milestone on the way to privatization was the **1983 National Biotechnology Strategy** which was launched with agriculture as the key sector. This was at the end of the Trudeau era, to be

followed by the Progressive Conservative governments for ten years, and then by the Liberals ever since. The intervention by those governments had three main methods:-

Direct Subsidies

Monopoly Rights and regulations to criminalize seed saving

Encouraging commercial seed sales, which included dismantling public plant breeding.

Many private corporations have benefited from direct subsidies. Interestingly enough, the governments then saw this as an opportunity to significantly reduce funding to public seed programs.

In the case of Patents, in 1982, a Commissioner of Patents established a trend when a yeast culture was granted patent status as well as a cell line for unicellular life forms and gene sequences. Eventually we have ended up with the situation where every canola field in Canada has some plants with the Roundup Ready gene, whether the fields are planted with RR canola or not.

Due to the favourable laws, contracts for RR seeds have been set up by Monsanto whereby the farmers agree to sign a Technology Use Agreement which means the following:-

1. A farmer can only use seed for planting one crop
2. The crop can only be sold for consumption to a commercial purchaser.
3. Monsanto generally controls the herbicides the farmer can use.
4. Monsanto reserves the right to make unannounced inspections.

Monsanto is not the only corporation using contracts. BASF Canada has the CLEARFIELD system for wheat, canola and corn. Farmers have to sign a CLEARFIELD Commitment. Some other seed companies which sell exclusively with contracts, even if the seeds are G.E, or not, are: C & M Seeds, Syngenta, Cargill & Dow AgroSciences, and ArcherDaniels Midland Co.

Once the monopoly rights and regulations are fully exercised it isn't difficult to predict the next stages. The seed industry will eventually have control over plant varieties once they leave the farm and enter the food system. A seed company could claim royalties from a bakery if it uses its speciality wheat.

The next Canadian government milestone was the **Plant Breeders' Rights Act of 1990**. The Act is designed to protect plant varieties. It dictates that farmers may not sell seeds to their neighbours. Perhaps the public are not aware, but this Act gives the powers of enforcement to the seed companies. Hence the Monsanto "police force" and the actions against Percy Schmeiser and other farmers. However, the companies have realized that the costs of court actions outweigh the fines. The result is the formation of the Canadian Plant technology Agency – a seed company body which will now issue tickets to farmers who don't follow the Federal legislation.

### The Present Situation

The Acts and regulations now regulate farmers not seeds.

G.M. seeds are wrecking the purity of the Canadian seed system

Conventional and organic grain supplies are rapidly being "infected" by GM seeds.

Registration and the classification system leave no room for plant breeding

The 5 largest seed firms may now control 25% of the global seed market and 71% of all patents in agricultural biotechnology. They are also the world's largest pesticide companies linked with pharmaceutical companies.

In much of Europe and parts of Asia labelling for GE foods is required, but not in Canada or the U.S. More than 40 countries have labelling requirements.

Four crops dominate the GE crop scene – corn, soybeans, canola and cotton. Corn and soy are ubiquitous in processed foods.

## The Future

The seed privatization and patents is not much different from the same issues with music, pharmaceutical drugs, software and intellectual property rights.

Taken to its logical conclusion we can expect that other areas of the economy will have the same controls. Chickens, dairy cattle, beef cattle, flowers, trees and salmon could all be on the list for privatization and ownership. It wouldn't take long to control all the food crops and domesticated animals as there are so few. Then the companies can move down the chain for control of mills, bakeries, flower shops, milk distributors, fast food franchises etc. Bear in mind we have arrived at the present situation in the space of only 30 years after millennia of seed production.

In Powell River, a growing farming area, we have an opportunity to preserve non-GE seeds. The geography of the area is a special advantage. As a "clean" area the organic farmers could survive and research could thrive here.

## Recommendations

1. That local governments declare their Regions as Genetically Engineered Free Crop Zones
2. That the Declaration be distributed to the following:-
  - The Member of Parliament
  - The Federal Minister of Agriculture
  - The Prime Minister
  - The Member of the Legislative Assembly
  - The Provincial Minister of Agriculture
  - The Premier
  - The National Farmers Union
  - Farmers' Institutes
  - The main seed corporations
  - The Organic Farmers' Association
  - The Senate
  - The Canadian Wheat Board.
  - Canadian Federation of Agriculture
  - Sierra Club
  - Council of Canadians
  - Canadian Organic Association of BC
3. That the people and organizations on the distribution list be asked to respond to the Zone declaration.
4. That Boards urge people to use the Declaration in order educate the general public as to what has been happening to farmers and the seed industry.
5. That Boards urge people to lobby their Governments to change the Patent laws, Intellectual Property laws, and the Plant Breeders' Rights' Act
6. That Boards urge the Federal Government to review the effects of the National Biotechnology Strategy.
7. That the Declaration be added as a note on all Regional District correspondence.
8. That Boards use the declaration to urge the Federal government to establish proper labelling for GE foods.