

PRESS RELEASE

Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations



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FISHERMEN'S GROUP ENDORSES COUNTY INITIATIVE TO BAN GENETICALLY-ENGINEERED CROPS

PCFFA CITES INCREASED PESTICIDE USAGE AND LACK OF CONTROL OVER GE CROPS AS BASIS FOR SUPPORT OF MENDOCINO'S MEASURE H

San Francisco, February 17 – Citing two recent scientific studies on genetically-engineered (GE) crops, the west coast's largest commercial fishermen's organization today announced its endorsement of Mendocino County's Measure H on the March ballot. The ballot initiative, if passed, would make the county the first in the nation to ban genetically-engineered crops.

At their meeting of the 16th and 17th in San Francisco, the Board of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA) unanimously endorsed the California north coast county's initiative. Increased pesticide usage associated with growing of genetically-engineered crops and the lack of effective controls over genetically-modified organisms to prevent their spread into the environment - threatening native plants and wildlife - were the basis for the fishing group's stand. Among PCFFA's member organizations is the Salmon Trollers Marketing Association of Fort Bragg (Mendocino County).

"The science is clear that at this time plants are mostly being engineered to tolerate higher pesticide usage – not surprising since some of the principal corporations involved in genetic engineering of crops are also pesticide manufacturers – and that means more pesticides in our water supply poisoning our fish and contaminating our seafood," said Pietro Parravano, a Half Moon Bay commercial fisherman and outgoing PCFFA President. "Moreover, there are simply inadequate controls at this time to confine genetically modified organisms - including fish - from commercial applications, whether agriculture, biopharms or fish farms, from getting into the wild."

Unlike selective breeding that has been used on plants and animals for hundreds of years to develop desired traits, genetically-engineered species, also referred to as genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) or "transgenic" species, have the gene or genes of one or more completely different species inserted to achieve the "desired" effect. Soy and corn, to date, have been the most prevalent among plants used in agriculture that have been genetically-modified. The first animal, awaiting approval for commercial use, is a genetically-engineered Atlantic salmon that has been modified to grow fast.

The State of California has already taken steps to control the commercial application of GE fish when it established regulations last year, requiring a permit for their possession and restricting their use to contained facilities mainly for scientific research purposes. The State Legislature also last year banned the ocean rearing in netpens or cages of any GE fish. There are no such controls on plants, however, used in agriculture, prompting the county initiative.

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In November, the Northwest Science & Environmental Policy Center, reported that the widespread use of GE crops engineered to tolerate broad spectrum herbicides, like Monsanto's Roundup, leads to weed herbicide resistance and increased use of the herbicide. The report, "Impacts of Genetically Engineered Crops on Pesticide Use in the United States: The First Eight Years," found "herbicide tolerant crops have increased pesticide use an estimated 70 million pounds over the last eight years," and warns, "the efficacy of herbicide tolerant technology is now seriously threatened by weed shifts and resistance. Herbicide use and costs are bound to rise for the foreseeable future." Fishermen are concerned increased pesticide use will result in more of the chemicals getting into the water affecting the health of fish directly or contaminating them so they are no longer safe to eat.

Then on January 20th, the National Academy of Science's National Research Council (NRC) released its report, commissioned by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That report found that while some techniques have been developed to prevent genetically-engineered organisms or their gene from escaping into the wild, most such techniques are still in early development and none appear to be completely effective. Pollen drift from GE crops to natural crops is one problem and has even led to claims by GE seed manufacturers to proceeds from adjoining farmers using non-GE plants when portions of a natural crop were pollinated by GE plants. The lack of controls over fish were also cited in the NRC report as being highly problematic.

"Measure H says let's be careful, let's be safe," said Parravno, who also served on the Pew Oceans Commission that called for measures to protect against pollution of the seas. "Before GE crops spread further, before there is more commercialization, there should be controls in place to make sure their use will not harm the environment or threaten existing food supplies. Until we have effective and fail-safe controls, a ban is appropriate."

In its report, the Pew Oceans Commission identified pollution of the oceans as a silent crisis. Pesticides, and other agricultural chemicals that wash into streams and eventually end up in rivers and the ocean are a major source of pollution.

Dan Platt, a Fort Bragg fisherman and President of the Salmon Trollers Marketing Association said increased pesticide use and the other unknowns associated with GE crops could undermine over 40 years of fish restoration programs in his county.

"Local fishermen have worked too long and too hard to bring back our salmon and protect our marine fish to let it all be destroyed because of water pollution and who knows what else resulting from growing genetically-engineered crops," said Platt. "The dangerous precedent here would be if voters fall for the barrage of propaganda from all the big chemical companies and their friends and fail to pass this important measure."

Attention Interested Media Personnel:

The report, "Impacts of Genetically Engineered Crops on Pesticide Use in the United States: The First Eight Years" (Technical Report 6) is available on the internet at: http://www.biotech-info.net/highlights.html#technical_papers.

The National Research Council report "Biological Confinement" can be found at: <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309090857/html/>.

