

# Organics Under Fire

by Rick Weller, Founder of Organically Done Plant Products



Most policy decisions made by our Washington lawmakers are highly influenced by corporate lobbyists. While this has always been true, it is particularly shameful when they are placing our food supply and our environment at risk.

An example, in March 2013 congress passed a bill that has commonly become known as the 'Monsanto Protection Act'. The bill prevents the courts from halting the sale of GMO seeds regardless of any related health issues. Who, besides those profiting from genetically engineered seeds (Monsanto) could possibly benefit from this?

Big business is motivated by short-term sales and profits. Corporate growers rely on chemicals because they believe it will result in the greatest yield at the lowest cost. Little, if any, value is placed on product quality or the environmental impact of these practices.

Here are some of the things going on that will negatively impact organic farming as well as all small farming operations.

## New Farm Bill

Congress is currently negotiating a new 5 year farm bill. Proposals include:

- Allowing federal regulations to override state regulations – so if a state votes for GMO labeling, the feds can overturn (Monsanto will only have to lobby in Washington)
- Removal of organic certification cost-sharing and organic research funding - I like cost saving but why don't we remove the \$25 billion of corporate farming subsidies first

## FDA Food Safety Bill

The FDA has drafted a new food safety bill to address outbreaks of foodborne illnesses (E. Coli, Salmonella, etc.). While buying from organic and local farmers does not guarantee contaminant-free produce, almost all outbreaks can be traced back to corporate farming operations. This bill places onerous fees, regulations and paperwork requirements on farming operations which few small farms can afford. Not that I'm against safety, but this new bill will drive many small farmers out of business – once again reducing the options that many of us rely on.

## USDA National Organic Program (NOP) and OMRI

The NOP board is made up of members who work for large agribusiness and consumer products companies – this board was originally intended to be made up of organic farming specialists and environmentalists. This board has approved a number of products and processes for use in organic operations that most of us normal folks would not allow including DHA, ARA, carrageenan, the addition of synthetic nutrients to 'organic' foods, allowance of synthetic pesticides, etc.

'Real' organic farmers do not want to use these products although the large corporate entities who have organic divisions do. What's the point in having an organic certification if it doesn't mean organic? To make it easier for corporations to benefit from 'organic' market premiums? As far as I can determine, these decisions are being made because the NOP has determined that they make 'economic' sense, not because they make 'organic' sense.

## Genetically Modified Crops

Many of the agricultural crops grown in the U.S. are now predominantly genetically modified: Corn - 88% GMO, Soy – 94% GMO, Cotton – 90% GMO, Canola – 90% GMO, Papaya – 90% GMO, Alfalfa – deregulated in 2011, Sugar Beets – 95% GMO. Several important crops (rice and wheat) do not have GMO versions approved but GMO versions have been discovered in the fields and in our food supply.

Analysts estimate that over 70% of all products found on grocery store shelves contain GMO ingredients. Soy, corn and alfalfa make up the majority of U.S. livestock feed.

State ballot measures to require labeling of GMO content on food packaging are continually defeated at the polls due to huge campaign contributions from corporate entities. The reasons stated by the supporters are 1) Re-labeling of existing products would be hugely expensive (give me a break, they re-label their packaging constantly) and 2), Consumers will not buy their products if they contain GMOs (did they really say this?).



*So, why should we be concerned?* The primary purpose of GM crops is to make them resistant to pesticides which has led to a huge increase in the amount of pesticides used. Numerous studies show potential links to human and livestock health issues. There is no way to control a genetically modified organism once it has been released in the environment meaning that soon, it will be very difficult to find non-GMO versions of anything in our food supply.

### **Corporate Cannabis**

Canada has only one legal supplier of medical cannabis - Plant Prairie Systems. Michigan legislators are considering a bill to allow medical marijuana sales at pharmacies like CVS, laying the path for corporate ownership of the supply chain (supported by lobbyists from Plant Prairie Systems of course).

Rumors abound that Monsanto is researching/developing strains of GMO cannabis and I see little reason why they would not be doing this. *Should we care?* Monsanto now 'owns' the corn market, in large part due to their legal prowess and influence in Washington DC. - they get laws passed that are only beneficial to Monsanto. Cannabis is one of the largest value crops in the U.S. - believe me, they are itching to own this market too. It took them less than 15 years for corn.

### **The Public Role**

Washington can be influenced by public opinion but it means that we all have to play an active role. So, be aware of what's going on and voice your opinion – don't put your head in the sand.

*It does work. In October 2013, the 'Monsanto Protection Act' was not renewed.*

**Organically Done** ([www.organicallydone.com](http://www.organicallydone.com)) is a Michigan manufacturer of organic fertilizers and soil amendments. Our mission is to produce high-quality truly organic products that provide everything your plants need while being free of potential contaminating sources that are found in many of today's "organic" alternatives – NOT ALL ORGANICS ARE CREATED EQUAL.