

gm-free ireland

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DON'T ALLOW GM CROPS IN IRELAND!

A MESSAGE FROM CANADIAN FARMER PERCY SCHEISER

Percy Schmeiser is a 74-year old Canadian farmer who got sued by Monsanto after his fields became contaminated by their patented GMOs in 1996. Monsanto claimed the profits from his entire crop, a technology charge, plus a million dollars in court costs. Eventually, the Supreme Court of Canada dismissed Monsanto's financial demands but ruled the patented GM crops are the company's property.

This ruling opened the door for massive class action lawsuits currently underway against Monsanto for losing control of its patented crops.

Percy Schmeiser is also a participant in the International Forum on the Future of Food and Agriculture.

This is the transcript of a **Global Vision** video interview of Percy Schmeiser by Michael O'Callaghan at the **Terra Madre** festival organised by **Slow Food** in Turin, Italy in October 2004, where 5,000 small farmers and artisanal food producers from 150 countries gathered to discuss the future of food and farming. For more information on these events, visit the Slow Food website at www.slowfood.com
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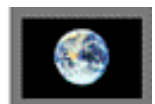
What's your story with Monsanto?

Monsanto laid a lawsuit against me back in 1996. This was a patent-infringement lawsuit where they said I was growing Monsanto's GMO canola (i.e. rapeseed) without a license.

Now I had never ever bought their seed and never been to one of their meetings. I didn't even know any Monsanto rep. This was a big concern to us at that time, because we were seed developers of canola for over half a century. So we realised there was a strong possibility our pure seed was contaminated, and indeed later on we did find it was contaminated by Monsanto, against our wishes.

Our fields got contaminated through direct seed movement from GMO canola (rapeseed) blowing in from other farmers' fields, or when farmers hauled it with their trucks it blew off. So that's what happened. We were contaminated, and we stood up to Monsanto, and eventually it went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

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Did Monsanto win the case?

No. In the initial pre-trials, Monsanto withdrew all allegations that we had ever obtained or grown their seed illegally. But they said that didn't matter. The fact that Monsanto found some of their GMO canola plants in a ditch along one of our fields meant that we had violated their patent. So that's basically what it went to court on – patent law. They have a patent on a gene which they inserted into canola which makes it resistant to their chemical Glyphosate or Roundup [also known as “Rodeo” and “Accord”, glyphosate is the most common worldwide wekiller; it has health risks for humans — Ed].

The first trial judge at the Federal Court of Canada ruled – and this is what made my case become internationally known – that it doesn't matter how Monsanto's GMOs get into any farmers' fields, whether you're an organic farmer or a conventional farmer. If it gets in there, you no longer own your seeds or plants. They become Monsanto's property. The rate of contamination doesn't mean anything. If it's one percent or fifty percent, you no longer own your seeds or plants. And furthermore, he ruled, even though we were seed developers who have been developing our own seeds for over half a century, we no longer could use our seeds or plants and they became Monsanto's ownership.

He also ruled that all our profit from our 1998 canola crop (we had approximately 500 hectares seeded) had to go to Monsanto – even from fields in which tests showed there had been no contamination. He said since we were seed developers using our own seeds from year to year, there was a probability of contamination. So basically, he ruled that a farmer ought to know when his fields were contaminated. But how do you do that when your seeds look identical and your plants look identical? So that's why we then stood up to Monsanto again and took it all the way to the Supreme Court.

Now the Supreme Court ruled that I did not have to pay Monsanto one red cent. At one time Monsanto had wanted their court costs and came after me for a million dollars. They wanted a \$15 per acre technology charge, they wanted all my profits from my 1998 crop on 500 hectares. So they didn't get a cent. But the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Monsanto owns and controls the gene if they have a patent on it. And that, I think, was a major loss for Monsanto, because if you own and control the gene and it gets out of control, you have a massive liability issue!

I think that's what Monsanto is going to be faced with now. If you own and control it and it gets out of control, you are responsible. I think you are going to see Monsanto faced with liability issues in the not-too-distant future.

Really what Monsanto is after is total control of the seed supply, which ultimately would give them total control of the food supply.

The threat is very crucial regarding the seed supply, because an organic farmer or a conventional farmer could wake up tomorrow morning and no longer own his seeds or plants – or no longer be allowed to use his seeds or plants, which would become owned by Monsanto. So you would lose all your indigenous seeds, your heritage seeds – everything – through cross-pollination, direct seed movement or contamination.

That's why it's so important not to introduce GMOs into any region of any country. There are two important things that come up:

NOTE: The Organic Agriculture Protection Fund, based in Percy Schmeiser's Canadian province of Saskatchewan, filed a class action lawsuit against Monsanto and Aventis (now Bayer) for damages caused by the introduction of GM canola and for an injunction to stop GM wheat. Following Monsanto's withdrawal of its application for regulatory approval of its Roundup Ready GM wheat in Canada and the USA in June 2004, the class action lawsuit is now focusing on the biotech companies' liability for GM canola contamination. On 2 February 2004 the claim was amended to include compensation for the ongoing costs of removing GM canola from certified organic farmers fields and seed supplies. The Organic Agriculture Protection Fund claims that, if biotech companies are allowed monopoly rights over their patented genes wherever they occur (as per the Canadian Supreme Court decision in Schmeiser vs. Monsanto in May 2004, then these companies must also be liable for the losses due to unwanted presence of these patented genes. This case is expected to set a world-wide precedent that will establish liability of companies for the uncontrolled spread of GMOs. Details may be found at www.saskorganic.com - Ed.]

Number one, and this is very important: there is no such thing as containment. Once you introduce GMOs into the environment – a new life-form – the seeds will spread by wind, the pollen will flow, cross pollination will take place, there will be direct seed movement by people, farmers hauling it, birds, bees, animals and so on.

The second important thing is that there is no such thing as co-existence! Once you introduce a GMO into a country or region, like happened to us in Canada, you will destroy the organic farmer and you will destroy the conventional farmer because of the cross-pollination and the contamination.

And because a GMO gene is a dominant gene, it will render any seeds or plants it contaminates into GMOs, so you no longer have a choice. Back in Western Canada, the organic farmers no longer have a choice in raising canola. It is all contaminated with GMOs so their choice has been taken away. It's the same with farmers growing organic soybeans; no longer can they do that, because within five or six years it has all been contaminated with GMOs. So we have now ended up with only GMO canola and soybeans in Canada.

So it's very important for farmers in Ireland or any country to be concerned, because you will never have a choice left again, all your crops will eventually become GMOs.

Then there are the contracts, the suppression of farmers rights and their freedom of speech with the contracts. Some of the issues in the contracts: if you commit some violation you have to sign a non-disclosure form and you can not tell the press or your neighbours what Monsanto has fined you or that it has made you destroy your crop.

And you also have to permit Monsanto's police. They have a very large police force in Canada; in the States they hire investigation services to police farmers, to go out to farmers' fields or granaries, to check without their permission, to go on their land or into their granaries.

And you are not allowed to use your seed. You only can buy the seed from Monsanto. You have to use chemicals from Monsanto. You have to pay them a license fee or technology charge of \$15 an acre each year.

So I don't think that farmers want this control! And then there are the lawsuits by Monsanto against farmers, of which there have been hundreds and hundreds in Canada and the United States.

So don't introduce GMOs because it does not increase yields. The quality is poor. And you have more chemical use than ever before, because a lot of the canola plants have turned into superweeds which now require a multitude of new chemicals to control.

Remember what Monsanto said to Canadian farmers back in 1996: increased yields, more nutritious crops, and less chemicals. All that turned out to be false. You do not have increased yields, you do have more chemical use, and furthermore the crops have poorer quality.

Is Monsanto really bombing farmers in Canada?

Yes. They try to intimidate and harass farmers. If they can't find a farmer at home, they'll take a small plane or helicopter and fly over the centre of a farmer's field. Our fields are quite large, normally about 160 acres, and in the centre they'll drop a Roundup herbicide-spray bomb. This will cover an area of 30 feet diameter area with the herbicide.

They will then fly back after about 10 or 12 days when the chemical has had time to activate, to see where they dropped the bomb. And if the crop has died, they know the farmer was not using Monsanto's GMO canola or soybeans. But if it hasn't died after being sprayed with the Roundup herbicide, they know the farmer has been using (or been contaminated by) Monsanto's seeds.

This is just one of the ways Monsanto tries to control farmers by harassing them or checking on them without their permission.

Is it true Monsanto's GM seed contract waives the right of the farmers and their children and grandchildren to hold Monsanto liable and sue them if something goes wrong?

Yes! If you have any problem, if you were growing Monsanto's GMO canola and you had a major problem with it, you couldn't even take Monsanto to court. You waive your rights of ever taking Monsanto to court in a lawsuit or talking to the media about your problem.

So basically they got control over your freedom of speech and expression, you cannot sue them, and you cannot use your own seed. You always have to go back to buy your seed each year, and you have to use their chemicals! It's a total domination of the seed supply, which is what they want, and it will ultimately give them total control of the food supply.

That's what it's all about. Increased chemical use, but most of all they want to control of that seed supply and farmers will lose it if they go the GMO way.

Farmers in Ireland should look at GMOs very closely. Don't allow it in, because once you do there is no calling it back! I guarantee you, if you introduce it today and I come back four or five years from now, it will be all over your country.