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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **PRESSURE BUILDS AGAINST GENETICALLY ENGINEERED WHEAT** *Farmers, Consumers, Native Americans, Rural Advocates and Organic Growers Seek Full Review of Monsanto's Pending Application*

Twenty-seven organizations formally endorsed a legal petition today asking the Bush Administration for a thorough analysis and public review of the social, economic and environmental impacts of genetically engineered wheat. The groups represented diverse constituencies, from the Minnesota Farmers Union, to the Center for Food Safety, to the Organic Trade Association, to the National Catholic Rural Live Conference, to the Intertribal Agriculture Council.

The groups signed onto a legal addendum in support of the original petition filed by Northern Plains' wheat farmers last March. The petition argues that the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) is legally obligated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to conduct a full environmental impact statement (EIS) on Monsanto's pending application to deregulate and commercially release genetically engineered Hard Red Spring Wheat. USDA has never required an EIS for decisions to release GE crop varieties, but wheat farmers and their allies have demanded a more thorough public review of the potential impacts of GE wheat introduction.

"When GE varieties of other crops, like corn, were introduced, USDA conducted only a cursory review," said Todd Leake, a North Dakota wheat farmer and member of the Dakota Resource Council, one of the original petitioners. "As a result, U.S. farmers lost millions of dollars in export markets."

The original petition called on USDA to institute a moratorium on the introduction of GE wheat until an EIS is completed that identifies potential socio-economic and environmental impacts of USDA's approval of Monsanto's application. The petition argues that the EIS should assess issues like the potential loss of export markets; the feasibility of segregating GE wheat from non-GE wheat; and the creation of so-called "super weeds," volunteer GE wheat plants that may be resistant to herbicides and could therefore disrupt cropping practices.

"We think we're getting the agency's attention," Leake said. "After we filed the petition last year, USDA rejected Monsanto's initial application as deficient. Our petition raised issues—like loss of export markets and the danger of super weeds—that, frankly, the USDA has never looked at seriously before in other crops."

Monsanto publicly stated it would resubmit its application for its Roundup Ready GE wheat by the end of last year, but so far has not done so.

In a cover letter submitted with the addendum of groups, Joe Mendelson, attorney with the Center for Food Safety, cited five new studies that demonstrate the potential for additional adverse agronomic impacts from the introduction of GE wheat. The letter asks USDA to consider these studies as it decides on whether to require an EIS.

The letter also reiterated an earlier request that USDA release its letter rejecting Monsanto's original application. "[W]e [the petitioners] would like to express our dissatisfaction in the agency's delay in publicly releasing the [rejection] letter sent to Monsanto finding their petition...deficient....[T]he delay of releasing such material...is inexcusable," it said.

The groups cited a study by Dr. Robert Wisner, a leading grain economist from Iowa State University, which concluded that the commercial release of GE wheat in the next 2-6 years could depress the price of wheat by 33% to 50% because of likely market rejection in Asia and Europe. The study also concluded that GE wheat introduction would devastate the economy of the spring wheat belt. This would occur because the loss of wheat export markets would lead to loss of wheat acreage; loss of revenue to industries supplying inputs to wheat producers; and losses for other rural farm-related and non-farm businesses, local and state government tax revenues, and institutions supported by tax revenues.

To read the EIS petition, the full list of signatories, the addendum cover letter (including descriptions of the new agronomic studies on GE wheat), and Dr. Wisner's study of the impacts of GE wheat introduction, go to: [www.iatp.org](http://www.iatp.org).

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