

## DAKOTA FARMER: OP-ED

Should North Dakota have a regulatory voice in determining the future of genetically-modified wheat?

Since North Dakota has historically been the top producer of high-quality hard red spring and durum wheats, the answer should obviously be an emphatic “Yes.” It is critical to the future of wheat production in the state of North Dakota that we take a very thorough, cautious and thoughtful approach to the introduction of GMO (genetically modified organisms) wheats.

First, we must give primary attention to the needs and concerns of our consistent customers, particularly our export markets which account for half of our sales. If we grow GMO wheats, we could be putting the entire wheat crop at a significant pricing risk because the customers that do not want GMO wheat will bypass the entire state in their purchases.

In addition to this fundamental question about market acceptance, we also need to resolve serious concerns about the feasibility and practicality of segregating GMO wheat through the production, marketing and transportation systems; the liability of producers and handlers of GMO commodities; the potential costs and benefits to producers, handlers, and consumers; impacts upon the state’s phytosanitary standards; the potentials for the development of future resistance in weeds and pests; and other public health and food system concerns.

These issues do not currently come under nor are they really considered within the scope of the current federal regulatory review process. The primary concerns of federal regulators are whether a GMO variety is a potential allergen or other readily identifiable health problem, or if it would pose a specific, proven negative environmental impact. In fact, a recent National Academy of Sciences study indicated that increased federal regulatory scrutiny should be given to new GMO varieties, particularly related to their potential for unintended consequences.

The initiative petition being circulated by the Go Slow with GMO Committee would provide North Dakota the needed process by which our state could have a real voice in decisions relating to the introduction of GMO wheats for commercial production. (Right now that decision is being made essentially by the biotechnology corporations). Based on expert review of the issues of concern to North Dakota and through a public hearing process, North Dakota would be able to decide on the future of wheat.

In the meantime, the measure allows research to continue. Our measure does not predetermine the outcome of future decisions about GMO wheat. In only provides the process by which North Dakota can have a meaningful voice in

that important decision. It would provide the mechanism by which the state could hold the biotechnology companies accountable for their actions. As the leading state in the production of high-quality wheats, we owe it to our future to take such a modest and sensible step.

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