

## **Notes on Presentations by Chris and Martin Boettcher**

### **Organic Hay and Sheep Producers, Ontario**

The Boettcher family has been producing organic crops and lamb products since the late 1990s. They are also exporters of organic crops.

Chris Boettcher stated that the organic industry just wants a level playing field in the industry, they don't support "short term gain for long term pain". Organic operations are typically of small acreage and the buffer zones that would be required to try to address pollen flow could consume up to half of a traditional organic production field.

Organic operations are also very labour intensive, and the added labour involved with managing buffer zones would not be acceptable to most organic producers.

Roundup Ready alfalfa would add to the Roundup load in the environment, and there is concern in the industry that increased use of Roundup will bring on other diseases and crop stressors like Fusarium.

### **Following is a transcript of Martin Boettcher's presentation, as provided on the Organic Council of Ontario's website:**

Like many producers today, I have more questions than answers.

What is the purpose of this meeting? Correct me if I'm wrong, but hasn't the outcome already been decided?

I am an organic farmer, and even though we will be the ones pulling the shorter straw on this issue, and today I want to speak to all farmers, because quite honestly, don't we all have the same goal? Is it not our common objective to nourish the consumers? I think we must stand united on this issue because inevitably, divided we fall.

I also stand here to represent the future of agriculture. I am in the process of building my own farm and hope that it will eventually provide an income for me and my descendants for years to come.

Why do we need GM alfalfa? Who gains from it?

Apparently, its purpose is to increase stand longevity by controlling the weeds. But alfalfa, if used in an intensive hay system, will never live long enough to allow weeds to be an issue. If anyone has ever seen a hay field killed by weed pressure, I would be very surprised and question your farming techniques. Obviously seed establishment can be an issue but nothing that can't be controlled by proper management. You tell us it's about weed control; I think it's about a different control. Do you want us signing Technology Use Agreements for everything we grow now?

Everyone will know that Roundup-Resistant crops have led to an astronomical increase in the use of Roundup, which results in Glyphosate, its active ingredient, now becoming increasingly obsolete as resistant weeds are emerging everywhere. The issue will be greatly accelerated by the approval of GM Alfalfa. Why continue milking a dead cow?

Everyone present here should understand that Glyphosate is a metal chelator that kills plants by tying up minerals. Our livestock mineral salesman doesn't mind, his sales have tripled in the last 15 years. GM corn has left dairy farmers having to feed up to a pound of mineral a day while realizing lower production compared to conventional feed varieties. Many have therefore opted to grow non-GM corn for this reason, however, coexistence of conventional and GM alfalfa is an oxymoron, it simply cannot exist.

I realize we do not have many alfalfa seed growers east of Manitoba, however, within a few short years western Canada's seed stocks will be contaminated by the regular seed and hay movement, intentional or not. Does anyone remember the "Hay West" campaign? Anyone who believes they can control the flight of the bees is naïve. You can hardly be certain that this room is bee-free as we speak. A single colony can spread pollen within a 75 square kilometer area. The three mile buffer will take 8 – 12 minutes of travel or about 40 seconds for 900 square feet. The resulting genetic pollution, unlike chemical pollution, will not fade over time, but increase because it is alive. Even now Manitoba alfalfa seed growers cannot and will not declare their production contamination-free because of very likely out crossing from so-called "controlled breeding plots" even before GM alfalfa has been approved. Sounds like a terrifying "déjà-vu" Does anyone want to see the Triffid Flax disaster all over again, which was also never an approved variety? How long did it take for all Canola to be contaminated? Was it two or three years? Does anyone know exactly? The out-crossing will affect Canadian seed producer and ruin a major industry. Is Canada destined to be a huge experimental field?

Where is the economic research, the cost-benefit analyses, behind the decision? As far as I am concerned, this is an example of politics driving science, not science and market research receiving approval by political bodies.

I have talked to many conventional and organic farmers and seed growers about GM Alfalfa and I have yet to meet one who supports its approval. I therefore want to remind everybody that we, the farmers, are the real stakeholders in this debate. Why have we never been consulted? Is this the democracy we are taught to be so proud of?