

Blé transgénique Round Up Ready

Description

Monsanto a prévu d'introduire commercialement du blé transgénique en 2003. Monsanto aurait bien aimé mettre sur le marché un blé qui avait un avantage pour le consommateur, mais, seul le blé RoundUp Ready est prêt... Suite à cette annonce, les professionnels de la filière blé s'inquiètent, non pas du blé transgénique en lui-même, mais de la fermeture des marchés. L'Association Américaine des producteurs de blé estime que ce blé ne sera intéressant que lorsqu'il sera accepté internationalement puisque 50% du blé américain est exporté (3,7 milliards \$ en 1999). D'ores et déjà l'Europe, le Japon et l'Egypte ont précisé qu'ils n'achèteraient pas ce blé. La Japan Flour Millers Association, qui représente 90% des importations de blé au Japon, a indiqué qu'elle le boycottera. De même, des producteurs de blé canadiens ne souhaitent pas que ce blé transgénique soit inscrit au catalogue officiel, car disent-ils, "même si nous ne voulons pas en cultiver, on peut se faire contaminer par pollinisation croisée". Enfin, les Etats du Montana et du Dakota du Nord ont d'ores et déjà prévu des moratoires sur ce blé, mais, petit détail, jusqu'en 2003.

MONSANTO GM WHEAT HOT TOPIC AT INDUSTRY GATHERING

By Carey Gillam, Reuters

February 1, 2001

NEW ORLEANS, La., Feb 1 (Reuters) – Plans for introducing genetically modified wheat were being debated by top wheat industry experts on Thursday, as continuing concerns about GM corn contamination had many wheat players skittish of what biotech tinkering might do to wheat exports. >From farmers to millers, fear and skepticism over GM wheat was widespread at the 2001 Wheat Industry Conference and Exposition, attended by hundreds of industry representatives. Though many said they thought technology would ultimately be beneficial for wheat producers as well as consumers, plans by Monsanto Co. to bring a GM wheat to market between 2003-2005 were seen by many as the wrong product at the wrong time.

« With five classes of wheat in the U.S., we already can give the customer

what he wants, » said U.S. Wheat Associates board member Fred Elling, a Montana wheat grower. « Why should we grow something they don't want ? » Elling and others said that international reluctance to embrace GM foods will hurt U.S. exports of all wheat if a GM strain is introduced. « We're in favor of biotechnology, but we're already struggling to have our grain exported, » said Kansas Association of Wheat Growers president Dean Stoskopf. « There is a lot of concern. »

The U.S. has seen U.S. corn exports hit hard by recent contamination of food-grade corn with non-food approved StarLink biotech corn, particularly in sales to top customer Japan. Efforts to segregate the GM corn from non-GM corn failed, resulting in product recalls and angry importers.

With the corn problems still ongoing, earlier this week a Japanese customer expressed strong reservations to the U.S. wheat industry about GM wheat prospects there, adding to a long list of negative comments and concerns that have been recorded from many countries, according to U.S. Wheat Associates, which markets U.S. wheat internationally. But with St. Louis-based Monsanto moving ahead with the world's first GM wheat product, a Roundup Ready variety that will be resistant to herbicide, wheat industry leaders were using this week's gathering to formulate a strategy aimed at easing the introduction.

INDUSTRY ASKS MONSANTO TO WOO IMPORTERS

To that end, the wheat industry has reached an agreement with Monsanto that calls for the establishment of an industry committee that will review an identity preservation system now being developed by Monsanto for GM wheat.

The committee will « criticize and provide input » to Monsanto on the IP system, which should be developed by the end of 2001, said Darrell Hanavan, chairman of the joint biotechnology committee of NAWG and U.S. Wheat Associates. The industry has also given Monsanto a list of 17 key wheat importers and has asked the company to work to gain customer acceptance in those markets, said Hanavan.

« What we hope to avoid is that we have a customer base that won't accept it, » he said. « We want it to be a successful introduction. » Hanavan said the industry believes it is preferable to introduce a consumer-driven GM wheat product first, in order to build market demand, rather than the producer-demand driven Roundup Ready.

Several companies are in the process of a GM wheat that would directly benefit consumers, including Monsanto, but the Roundup Ready wheat is the nearest to commercialization, and is not likely to be delayed, industry experts said.

That makes many nervous, including those in the milling industry, said North American Millers Association president Betsy Faga. Millers are very worried about the ability to adequately segregate GM from non-GM wheat, and somewhat skeptical about how well an identity preservation system will work. Consumer tolerance and acceptance will be key, Faga said.

For its part, Monsanto officials see the concerns as valid, said spokeswoman Kelly Clauss. The company has committed to not commercializing the GM wheat until it is food- and feed-approved in the United States and in Japan, and it will work hard to gain consumer acceptance of wheat products through

educational programs, she said.

Clauss said though some may disagree with Monsanto's strategy, the introduction of the first GM wheat and the industry activities surrounding plans for that introduction are significant for the future. « It is an important step for the wheat industry, » Clauss said, « This is an invaluable opportunity. If all these people can come together and bring some consensus around a project like Roundup Ready wheat ... the potential for what that might hold for the future of wheat is great. »

EUROPEAN BUYERS WARN U.S. OVER GENE WHEAT PLANS

By Greg Frost, Reuters

February 2, 2001

PARIS – European buyers of U.S. spring wheat said on Friday there was no market for genetically modified (GM) wheat in Europe and warned they would take their business elsewhere if U.S. farmers began planting such crops. « We will never be in the market for it, » said Kjetil Gran Bergsholm, a trader at Norwegian importer Stakorn. He said Norway bought 30,000-40,000 tonnes of high-quality wheat each year, and he chose between supplies from the United States, Canada and Kazakhstan based on price. « We have to listen to our customers, and they don't want GM wheat. If the U.S. goes ahead with this, we'd have to turn to Canada and Kazakhstan to get those supplies, » he said. St. Louis, Missouri-based Monsanto Co said last month it was moving ahead with the world's first GM wheat product despite concerns about scientific tinkering with food grains. Monsanto said it is developing a Roundup Ready variety of dark northern spring wheat, which it hopes to commercialise

between 2003 and 2005. The wheat, modified to resist the company's Roundup herbicide, is designed to boost yields.

While Norway only buys a few thousand tonnes of U.S. dark northern spring wheat each year, Europe represents a key market for the grain. According to USDA statistics, U.S. exports of dark northern spring wheat to the European Union and other western European countries totalled more than 1.1 million tonnes in 1999/2000 — nearly a fifth of all U.S. dark northern spring wheat exports that year.

NOT READY

Fearing the loss of possible markets in Europe and elsewhere, the U.S. wheat industry has reached an agreement with Monsanto that calls for a panel to review a so-called identity preservation system the company is developing that would segregate GM wheat from non-GM wheat. The industry has also given Monsanto a list of 17 key wheat importers and has asked it to work to gain customer acceptance for the wheat in those markets.

It was not immediately clear, however, whether Monsanto would be able to convince consumers in Europe—a hotbed of opposition to bio-engineered crops—of the benefit of wheat that is modified to resist a weed-killing chemical. « Our customers—supermarkets, bakeries and the like—they're not ready for it, » a purchaser at a large northern European miller said, noting European shoppers were increasingly aware of what went into the products they buy.

« It could mean that we would completely stop importing from that region if they could not guarantee that it is not genetically modified, » he added.

Alexander Waugh, director-general of British and Irish millers' association

NABIM, said his group was scheduled to meet Monsanto in the coming weeks to discuss its GM wheat proposal, among other issues.

« The reality is that for the time being, our customers in Europe don't really want anything genetically modified, and it's difficult to see that changing in the near future, » Waugh said. « UK millers have regularly pressed Monsanto that for genetically modified crops to have any marketing potential, they have to offer consumers a benefit, » he said. « Personally, I don't think Roundup Ready offers a lot to consumers. »

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