

Canadian Government in Conflict of Interest over Genetically Modified Wheat Partnership with Monsanto

ALISON SMITH (HOST):

Back here at home now, it's a relationship that's always made opponents of genetically modified foods uneasy: Agriculture Canada's involvement with biotech firm Monsanto. Through an access to information request, CBC News has learned there's more to that relationship than previously thought. David Common has the details.

DAVID COMMON (REPORTER):

It barely looks the part now, but until recently, an experimental crop grew in this field, genetically modified wheat developed by biotech giant Monsanto. The company recently applied for a license to sell the new seed.

That application went to agriculture Canada. But while the government department is the regulator, it has also been actively involved in developing the seed. Now, documents obtained by the CBC show just how involved. Agriculture Canada has been paying for some of the development and it stands to profit if the wheat is grown and sold in Canada. Six years ago, Agriculture Canada committed \$850,000 to help Monsanto develop the seed. It also provided unfettered access to test the crop in its experimental fields and assigned three key government scientists to work with Monsanto to nurture development. Altogether, the contributions total nearly 2 and a half million dollars.

BRADFORD DUPLISEA (CANADIAN HEALTH COALITION):

It's a dangerous conflict of interest.



DAVID COMMON (REPORTER):

The Canadian Health Coalition has been a long-time opponent of genetically modified foods.

**BRADFORD DUPLISEA
(CANADIAN HEALTH COALITION):**

Government regulators cannot be in bed with the industry that they regulate. This is paramount.

DAVID COMMON (REPORTER):

But the government says it has a long history of helping other Canadian companies develop new products and will be able to keep the two issues separate. And this agricultural biotechnologist says while it may seem a conflict, it may also be necessary.



**MURRAY FULTON
(UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN):**

They feel that a new technology is coming along; it needs to be supported because they believe that somewhere down the road, there's going to be some benefits to society.

DAVID COMMON (REPORTER):

The financial benefits for the government, a royalty of up to 5% of Monsanto sales, but only if the wheat is approved.

JOHN CULLEY (AGRICULTURE CANADA):

It's just a small percentage of the sales is returned to the Crown for reinvestment in research.

DAVID COMMON (REPORTER):

And genetically modified wheat grown on a large scale may not be that far away. Ottawa is expected to rule on Monsanto's licensing application in the New Year. David Common, CBC News, Regina.



-- THE END --

Source: The National
Broadcast Date: 11.29.2003
Time: 22:00 EST
Network: CBC Television
Length: 407 words