



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

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Open Letter to Stakeholders:

Complexity surrounds American agriculture today. With the recent announcement of USDA's final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for genetically engineered (GE) Roundup Ready alfalfa and the subsequent meeting to bring together diverse stakeholders for a dialogue, USDA has taken decisive steps toward looking at possible approaches to alfalfa production coexistence that are reasonable and practical.

These actions have generated tremendous interest in USDA's and my intentions regarding our ability to objectively regulate GE agricultural products and whether we are focused enough on science. I have tremendous confidence in our existing regulatory system and no doubts about the safety of the products this system has approved and will continue to approve. As a regulatory agency, sound science and decisions based on this science are our priority, and science strongly supports the safety of GE alfalfa. But, agricultural issues are always complex and rarely lend themselves to simple solutions. Therefore, we have an obligation to carefully consider USDA's 2,300 page EIS, which acknowledges the potential of cross-fertilization to non-GE alfalfa from GE alfalfa - a significant concern for farmers who produce for non-GE markets at home and abroad.

The rapid adoption of GE crops has clashed with the rapid expansion of demand for organic and other non-GE products. This clash led to litigation and uncertainty. Such litigation will potentially lead to the courts deciding who gets to farm their way and who will be prevented from doing so.

Regrettably, what the criticism we have received on our GE alfalfa approach suggests, is how comfortable we have become with litigation – with one side winning and one side losing – and how difficult it is to pursue compromise. Surely, there is a better way, a solution that acknowledges agriculture's complexity, while celebrating and promoting its diversity. By continuing to bring stakeholders together in an attempt to find common ground where the balanced interests of all sides could be advanced, we at USDA are striving to lead an effort to forge a new paradigm based on coexistence and cooperation. If successful, this effort can ensure that all forms of agriculture thrive so that food can remain abundant, affordable, and safe.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary