

## Canada Introduces New Pest Control Products Act

Federal Health Minister Anne McLellan introduced a proposed new Pest Control Products Act in the House of Commons on March 21, 2002. This new act proposes significant changes to the current legislation in order to improve the regulatory process and strengthen health and environmental protection.

Backgrounders to the new act issued by Health Canada outline several commitments regarding pesticide access: support for international harmonization of regulatory requirements, a full-time minor use advisor to help address the special needs of minor use crops, rationalization of geographic zones to optimize data requirements and reduced timelines for the registration of reduced-risk pest control products.

Other highlights of the proposed legislation include heightened transparency and public access to information as well as increased tools for enforcing compliance. Many policies and procedures outlined in the proposed legislation - special consideration for the needs of children and infants, additional margins of safety for vulnerable populations, consideration of the cumulative effects of pesticide exposure from multiple sources - are already adopted in practice by regulators and industry, but are not part of the PCP Act currently in place.

Full text of the proposed legislation is available on the Internet at:

[http://www.parl.gc.ca/PDF/37/1/parlbus/chambus/house/bills/government/C-53\\_1.pdf](http://www.parl.gc.ca/PDF/37/1/parlbus/chambus/house/bills/government/C-53_1.pdf)

### **Analysis:**

AGCare and other farm and agri-food groups are currently analysing the proposed legislation to determine its potential impact.

From AGCare's perspective, the emphasis on access to reduced risk, safer alternatives for pest control is very positive. Farmers have long cited the need for newer, safer technologies for protecting farm crops from pest damage. What is not clear, however, is the manner in which such access will be facilitated to ensure that farmers have the tools they need.

The legislation calls for mandatory re-evaluation of all pesticides within 15 years of their introduction, as well as immediate review of any pesticide that is banned in any OECD country. These provisions could result in the removal of pesticides from the marketplace for which farmers have no suitable alternatives. In other jurisdictions, such as the US, regulators can remove a product from the market only if a suitable alternative is available. Ontario's crop growers are disappointed that a similar condition was not included in the new legislation in order to protect agri-food production and provide an incentive to federal regulators for ensuring that improved farm production technologies are readily made available.

Harmonizing the removal of products from the marketplace is viable only if the introduction of replacement products and new technologies is also harmonized. Although the farm community has long promoted the need for such harmonization, few successes have been achieved.

The proposed Act calls for several measures to increase the transparency of the regulatory process. While no doubt well-intentioned, this change could potentially result in a further drag on the availability of submissions for registration. This intent should more closely parallel the US EPA guidelines to facilitate parity.

### **Minor Use Issues**

The special needs of minor use crop production are not recognized in the proposed Act. This is a

major concern: although the specific needs represented by minor uses are individually small, collectively they represent a significant percentage of use for Canadian growers. According to backgrounders released by Health Canada, however, several commitments will be undertaken on behalf of minor use:

- PMRA will identify a full-time minor use advisor, make changes to the boundaries of geographic zones to reduce the number of residue trials required, and reduce timelines for the review of applications to register reduced risk minor use products.

- AAFC will strengthen its program and financial support for the development and testing of minor use products.

These measures, though not included in the proposed legislation, may help to address some of the ongoing challenges to minor use crop production.

## Summary

A new Act is just the beginning. Although AGCare supports the efforts of the Minister of Health to improve Canada's pesticide regulatory system, we are somewhat concerned that the proposed Act includes little apparent consideration of users' needs or the critical role that pesticides play in ag & food production and public health. We look forward to working with Health Canada and PMRA to develop an improved pesticide regulatory system that will meet the needs of all stakeholders, including users and the general public, and meet the goals of environmental protection and sustainability. [top](#)

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## New Leadership for AGCare

Although new to the role of AGCare chair, Grimsby-area farmer Mary Lou Garr has been involved in farm environmental issues for more than two decades. As well as assuming increasing responsibilities within the organization since first being named as OFA's representative in 1995, Garr has also been active on many other provincial and national committees dedicated to such issues, and has recently been appointed to the Dean's Advisory Council for the Ontario Agricultural College's new dean, Dr. Craig Pearson.

"I don't think any farmer can farm without keeping environmental issues top-of-mind," said Garr. "And it's also up to us as farmers to help contribute to a greater understanding of the positive environmental accomplishments that farmers have achieved by reaching out through coalitions such as AGCare."

Garr believes that the coalition approach is very effective, and gives the farm sector a strong and unified voice on key issues: "The issues that we deal with through AGCare - pesticides, biotechnology, and related environmental issues - are more important than ever for the future of farming. Economic pressures on the sector mean that farmers must have access to a wide variety of production tools. Public concerns regarding the use of the technology must continue to be addressed in a proactive manner."

Garr looks forward to working with AGCare's board of directors as well as with other groups at the national and international levels in order to achieve common goals, but predicts no major change in focus for the organization. In reference to AGCare's role in food safety, the new chair confirmed that: "all of the issues we deal with are seen as food safety issues. AGCare will

continue to be involved on food safety and farmers' use of technology as part of our focus on farming and the environment."

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## ***Emerging Issues and Opportunities in Agri-Food Production:*** **AGCare Annual Meeting Report**

According to Mary Lou Garr, Grimsby area farmer and new chair of AGCare, farming is full of challenges, and farmers need access to every tool they can get to help make their businesses successful. These remarks set the stage for AGCare's 10th Annual Meeting held February 12 in Guelph, which focused on the theme of emerging issues and opportunities.

The day-long event featured a panel of distinguished speakers who addressed a variety of issues.

According to Diane Wetherall, Executive Director of the Food Biotechnology Communications Network (FBCN), the issue of food biotechnology must be placed in context with other food and agricultural issues. The FBCN toll-free information line (1-866-FOODBIO) continues to provide information direct to consumers, and it is increasingly apparent that, for the general public, concerns regarding food biotechnology are often related to more general food safety questions. To address these concerns, FBCN is planning to expand its mandate through strategic alliances with the Food Safety Network and other affiliated groups in order to provide a comprehensive approach to providing information on food safety options and alternatives.

Peter Phillips, co-chair of the Canadian Biotechnology Advisory Committee's GM Foods Project, suggested that many of the issues in the current debate around GM foods, such as private vs. collective ownership, are not unique to GM foods. In their study of GM Foods, the CBAC committee focused on the more broadly defined 'Novel Foods', examining Canada's current regulatory approach and making recommendations for improvement and refinement. Although Dr. Phillips emphasized that there are no identifiable health concerns with foods that are now on the market, he also outlined a series of recommendations made by CBAC that would increase the transparency and clarity in our regulatory system. CBAC continues to seek public input on their draft recommendations.

Resolution of the issues surrounding minor use pesticides is not only essential for increasing the ability of Canadian growers to compete, but will also result in greater human health and environmental safety, according to Rick DeBrabandere, vice-chairman of the Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers and member of AGCare's Board of Directors. New efforts by government, and by a coalition of stakeholder groups, to address these ongoing issues were outlined by Charlie Milne, vice-president of government affairs for CropLife Canada and member of the Steering Committee for the new National Minor Use Project.

According to Steve Webb, Dow AgroSciences, biotechnology is a powerful source of innovation that can improve existing products as well as create new ones, and has enormous potential for the future. In his presentation, Dr. Webb outlined the spectrum of potential applications of biotechnology in agricultural production, from food crops (high volume, low value) through chemical polymers and specialty chemicals to enzymes, nutritional supplements and pharmaceutical molecules (low volume, high value).

A fundamental shift in Canada's agricultural policy was outlined by Greg Poushinsky, Director of the Food Research Program for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The goal of this new policy is to create an integrated framework for agriculture in Canada, based on five principal elements:

Risk Management, Food Safety and Food Quality, Environment, Renewal and Science and Innovation.

At a board meeting immediately following the annual event, directors elected as chair Mary Lou Garr, who has represented the Ontario Federation of Agriculture on AGCare's board since 1995, and has served as AGCare's vice-chair since 1998. Peter VanderZaag, representing the Christian Farmers' Federation of Ontario, will serve as first vice-chair, and Greg Hannam, Ontario Soybean Growers, will serve as second vice-chair. [top](#)

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## Who Grows GM Crops?: Stats Canada Report

Since June, 2000, Statistic Canada's Agriculture Division has been collecting and analyzing data on genetically modified seed used in grain corn and soybean cropping in Quebec and Ontario. A recent study undertaken by the group and designed to provide Canadians with reliable information on the use and the benefits of GM crops, provides a profile of growers in Ontario and Quebec who choose to grow GM grain corn and soybeans.

The study is based on information collected in Ontario and Quebec in 2000. Researchers found:

- Farmers who choose to grow GM corn and soybeans believe that GM seeds offer an effective means of controlling pests, reducing the use of chemical pesticides and associated costs, and increasing crop yields.
- Farmers in all farm size categories view GM grain corn and soybeans as an alternative means of weed and pest management.
- Although GM crop varieties are used in all farm size categories, the smallest farm operations (< 490 acres) accounted for the highest level of use.
- Among the benefits of GM crop production, growers cited increased flexibility in controlling weeds through the use of Roundup Ready soybean and grain corn varieties. Growers confirmed that they needed fewer chemicals and treatments with the use of such varieties, and believed that they also felt offer environmental advantages because Roundup leaves fewer residues in the soil than do other products.
- Average yields of GM grain corn (mostly insect-resistant Bt corn) were higher than those for non-GM grain corn, while differences in soybean yield were negligible. Researchers caution that it is difficult to measure the actual impact of GM seed on crop yields based on data from a single growing season, and point out that the wet, cool 2000 season was unfavorable for both crops.
- Many growers who choose GM crop varieties are also involved in livestock production: more than 58% of grain-corn producers and more than 40% of soybean growers. Researchers speculate that, in many cases, farmers use GM crop varieties to meet their own needs, particularly for feeding livestock.

The full study can be downloaded from the Statistics Canada website:

<http://www.statcan.ca/cgi-bin/downpub/listpub.cgi?catno=21-601-MIE02052>

[top](#)

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## Safety of Biotech Foods: Toxicologists Speak

The Society of Toxicology (SOT) is a professional and scholarly organization of scientists from academic institutions, government and industry. Its 5200 members are drawn from 44 countries. A not-for-profit scientific society, SOT is dedicated to supporting the creation of sound scientific information that reduces uncertainties in assessing risks to human health and the environment.

Recently, the group produced a study on the safety of foods produced through biotechnology. Highlights are outlined below. The full paper is available at:

[http://www.agbioworld.org/biotech\\_info/articles/toxsoc.html](http://www.agbioworld.org/biotech_info/articles/toxsoc.html)

According to SOT, there is no reason to suppose that the process of food production through biotechnology leads to unique or higher risks than foods produced through other processes. The paper emphasizes the importance of focusing on the characteristics of a new food, rather than on the process through which it is made, in the assessment of its health and environmental safety. This position is consistent with that of many other international scientific bodies, and also underlies Canada's 'novel foods' approach to food safety assessment.

The group supports the concept of substantial equivalence as a starting point in the safety assessment for foods produced through biotechnology, believing that the approach both protects public health, and offers the flexibility that will be required as transgenic technology evolves.

From a human health perspective, the group believes that there is minimal possibility of adverse effects arising from the presence of foreign DNA by either direct toxicity or gene transfer. Several reasons are offered for this belief:

- The transgene in a genetically engineered plant is not a new type of material to our digestive systems and is present in extremely small amounts. (In transgenic corn, for example, the transgenes represent about 0.0001% of the total DNA.)
- Dietary DNA has no direct toxicity.
- There is no compelling evidence to indicate that plant-derived DNA, whether transgene or not, is incorporated into or expressed by the people, animals or other organisms that consume it.

SOT has concluded that the safety of foods currently produced through biotechnology is equivalent to that of traditional foods. There are no verified records of adverse health effects from the production or consumption of such foods. As the technology evolves, however, toxicological methodologies and regulatory strategies will need to keep pace in order to ensure that this level of safety is maintained.

[top](#)

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## Fact Sheet Series on Pesticides Now Available

A new fact sheet series on agricultural pesticide use and related issues is [now available](#) on the AGCare website. This series augments the previously developed Biotechnology & Agriculture resources, and will help to explain how and why pesticides are used in food production as well as the steps taken by Canada's regulators and by farmers themselves to ensure safe and responsible use.

Titles in this series include:

- What is a Pesticide?
- A Brief History of Agricultural Pesticides
- Why Farmers Use Pesticides
- Trends in Pesticide Use in Ontario
- Pesticide Education Programs
- Integrated Pest Management
- What Happens to Pesticides that are Applied to Crops?
- Regulation of Pesticides in Canada
- Safety First: Protecting Health and the Environment
- Protecting the Safety of Our Food Supply
- Assessing the Environmental Risks of Pesticides in Canada
- Potential Health Effects of Agricultural Pesticides
- Pesticides and the Endocrine System
- Pesticides and Well Water
- Do Pesticide Residues Build Up in the Bodies of Animals?
- Pesticide Resistance

For more information, or to order print versions of our resource sheets, please contact the AGCare office: 519-837-1326 (phone); 519-837-3209 (fax); [agcare@agcare.org](mailto:agcare@agcare.org) (e-mail). Printing and handling charges will be applied for bulk orders. Single sets will be provided free of charge.

AGCare information resources are produced and distributed with the assistance of funding made available by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the CanAdapt program, administered by the Agricultural Adaptation Council.[top](#)

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AGCare (Agricultural Groups Concerned about Resources and the Environment) is funded by all major Ontario farm organizations involved in crop production. Over 45,000 Ontario horticultural and field crop producers are represented on agricultural pesticide use, crop biotechnology developments, and other environmental issues through 17 member groups. For further information, contact AGCare's Head Office: 90 Woodlawn Road West, Guelph, Ontario N1H 1B2; 519-837-1326 (telephone), 519-837-3209 (fax), [agcare@agcare.org](mailto:agcare@agcare.org) (e-mail) or visit our website: [www.agcare.org](http://www.agcare.org)