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4 February 2003

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GMO protocols topic of public hearing

A public hearing on the adoption of protocols for Genetically Modified Organisms' use on Boulder County Open Space lands will be held at 2 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 11. The meeting will take place in the commissioners' hearing room on the third floor of the Boulder County Courthouse on the Pearl Street Mall in downtown Boulder.
The protocols in question involve allowing farmers who lease Boulder County Open Space lands for agricultural use to grow three types of genetically modified corn in subsequent growing seasons.

The 10 members of the Genetically Modified Organism Technical Advisory Committee (GMO TAC) voted 7-1 Nov. 26, 2002 (one abstention and one absent) to recommend the Boulder County Commissioners limit the genetic varieties of corn permitted to be planted on agricultural lands owned by the county. They recommended a pesticide resistant variety, Bt corn and two herbicide-resistant varieties ? Roundup Ready and Liberty Link.
They presented their recommendations to the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Advisory Committee (POSAC) at a public meeting Dec. 12, 2002. POSAC recommended the Boulder County Commissioners approve the protocols.

GMO TAC also made the following recommendations:

1. 1. Buffer distances of 150 feet between genetically modified corn and any corn that a neighboring grower wishes to maintain acceptably free from pollen drift from the genetically modified corn, a distance that has been shown in Boulder County to provide greater than 99.4 percent identity preservation of the neighboring corn variety;
2. Suggested alternatives to the commissioners to maintain acceptable purity levels (identity preservation) of the neighboring corn, whether organic or conventional, including various buffer-sharing schemes ranging from 100 percent buffer responsibility of the open space grower to a variety of shared responsibility options between the open space grower and the neighboring grower;
3. Required adherence to current FDA and seed company planting and monitoring standards for a minimum of 20 percent non-Bt corn in a field of Bt corn, to ensure that the European Corn Borer insect does not develop insect resistance;
4. Development of procedures by Boulder County Parks and Open Space staff to contact neighboring farmers who may be impacted by genetically modified corn grown on open space, so that the neighbors can work out acceptable crop and buffer agreements whenever possible;
5. Development of procedures by county staff, including informal procedures or formal mediation, for conflict resolution to address complaints about the use of genetically modified corn on open space between growers where at least one of them is an open space grower planting a genetically modified crop;
6. Development of methods by county staff to monitor open space growers' compliance with the protocols.

Several minority opinions from committee members were submitted. The minority opinions recommend:

1. That Boulder County not approve the use of Bt corn on Boulder County open space due to insufficient evidence that there is enough European Corn Borer insect infestation to warrant use of the built-in pesticide;
2. A shared responsibility between the open space grower and the neighboring grower based upon proportional size of the fields,
3. That backyard gardeners including owners of residential property qualify as growers who can request a 150-foot buffer.

The Boulder County Parks & Open Space Department leases a portion of its open space lands to farmers who grow crops on those lands.

In 2002, Boulder County farmers planted about 400 acres of genetically modified corn on open space land ? about 10 percent of the approximately 4,000 acres of open space land planted in corn. Nationally, 35-40 percent of all corn grown is genetically modified.

After some groups expressed concerns about pollen drift in 2000, the Boulder County Commissioners formed a scientifically oriented advisory committee comprised of molecular biologists, plant and soil scientists and farmers representing organic, conventional and biotech crop growers.

The GMOTAC is comprised of:

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Annette Brant, at-large, h) 303-442-8703
Patrick Byrne, plant scientist (CSU) h) 970-224-1409; w) 970-491-6985
Laura Conley, at-large, h) 720-565-8241
Robert Davis, at-large, h) 303-673-0577
John Ellis, farmer, h) 303-440-0750
Sylvia Fromherz, plant scientist (CU), h) 303-823-6795; w) 303-492-5062

Mark Retzloff, organic farmer, h) 303-440-9547; w) 303-447-0495
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