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### Board approves GE crop registration proposal; document to form basis of new ordinance



Written by Elizabeth Larson  
Tuesday, 09 February 2010

LAKEPORT – In a unanimous vote last week, the Lake County Board of Supervisors accepted a set of proposals that it will use as the basis for an ordinance to regulate genetically engineered (GE) crops in Lake County.

The county's GE Crops Advisory Committee offered the final proposal. Committee members said that an estimated 40 meetings and hundreds of hours of discussion yielded their final proposal, which they said represented a middle ground approach despite the fact that they had at least begun their work with polarized stances.

The nine-paragraph document proposed registration of GE crops, which would be overseen by a five-member committee including at least three growers, plus one person with scientific training in an agricultural or plant science discipline and a University of California farm advisor to assist the group.

The Board of Supervisors unanimously suggested using the proposal for the basis of an ordinance, with some changes, including dropping a paragraph that gave a five-year time frame to reexamine the process and directing county staff to come up with estimates on what the registration proposal would cost the county.

The GE Crops Advisory Committee began meeting in January 2009, and late last year came back close to having a proposal but

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lacking the needed consensus, which for their purposes was unanimous.

The Board of Supervisors later agreed to reduce the committee number down to seven, and that "phase two" group was selected in December and came back with the proposal.

Committee member Andre Ross presented the proposal in the absence of Mark Hooper, a committee alternate who has helped facilitate meetings.

Ross said the document created a framework for another, future committee that would monitor GE crop registration with the assistance of the agricultural commissioner. They also suggested a "reasonable enforcement mechanism" to ensure compliance with the rules.

During public comment, Lower Lake resident Victoria Brandon said the committee approached the proposal "from a very polarized standpoint," and initially many of the committee's members made speeches at each other.


She said they were able to come to the middle and produce a set of recommendations to meet local needs in regard to GE crops, an issue that she said concerns many community members.

Brandon said the committee members agreed that, going forward, the committee that will monitor registration should have the highest level of transparency, and she urged the board to keep the group's Web page for that purpose and to notice its activities in the press.

The committee, according to Brandon, spent a lot of time discussing a dual registration system in which growers could use either the agricultural commissioner or the California Crop Improvement Association. The latter was suggested because of the concern that there wouldn't be sufficient privacy through the agricultural commissioner.


The committee couldn't agree on standards for buffer zones, which were proposed to be based either on a range that allowed for a de minimus gene flow level of 0.1 percent for seed crops, 0.5 percent for food crops and 0.9 percent for animal feed and native plants, versus a nondetectable level. The proposal was meant to give a higher protection to seed crops, which depend on purity, Brandon said.

None of the members of the committee that offered the proposal were intending for their group to be extended, said Brandon. "This was not part of the deal."



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They had fulfilled their mandate and wanted to be officially dissolved so they could have a potluck, Brandon said.

Lower Lake resident Charles Hossom said there have been no risks identified and no health risks documented because of GE crops, and he suggested the proposal's impacts on property rights needed to be weighed carefully. He also was concerned that if the county's rules were stricter than those of the state or federal government, legal issues could arise.

Chuck March, executive director of the Lake County Farm Bureau, said that the group has been opposed to any regulation on GE crops for the past six years.

"We still believe strongly that these crops are legal, safe and authorized for use by various agencies of the federal government," he said, reading from a Farm Bureau statement. "They are an important tool and the choice to utilize this technology should be available to agriculture producers in Lake County."

The Farm Bureau requested that the board support a concept included in a letter from Hooper on Jan. 28, which outlined the positive uses of GE technology, March said. Last November, the Farm Bureau's local board voted to support a proposed registration process as presented to the board in December.

March outlined some of the group's concerns, including confidentiality, which they felt was offered by third party registration. They also supported having a five-member registration committee.

Finley organic farmer Phil Murphy said many people believed that, with the new president, there would be changes in how agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency and the US Department of Agriculture would be run, but he said they're seeing a continuation of the impact of corporate interests.

"The bottom line is, if anything's going to be done to protect the property rights of people in this county from unwanted contamination, it's going to have to be done here," he said.

With the state and federal government unlikely to get involved, "It's basically up to you folks to do this job," Murphy said.

He said he had some small reservations, and suggested going with the lower level of possible contamination. He also was wary of terminology that was too vague regarding the member of the monitoring committee that should have "scientific training."

Beyond that, he said, he found it a good example of how people with different

Religion

Legals

Health

viewpoints can sit down and work out their issues and address each others' concerns. "I think it's a good example of democracy in action."

Board members discussed paragraph nine of the proposal, which stated, "No less than five (5) years from the date of establishment, this regulation process may be re-visited by the Lake County Board of Supervisors."

The supervisors didn't find a reason to have the clause, which they later agreed to remove.

Supervisors Rob Brown also raised issues about the document's paragraph six, which said that the registration process' overhead costs will be borne by the county. In light of a discussion at the board meeting earlier in the day about the prospect of having staff layoffs, Brown wanted to know how much money it would cost.

Board Chair Anthony Farrington said they could have staff determine that so it didn't become an unfunded mandate.

Michelle Scully, another committee member, said the effort was a labor of love for those involved.

"We wrestled with something really weighty, and that's really emotional for a lot of people," said Scully, who said he was "hugely pro-farmer," meaning she supported family farmers, not corporate farmers.

Scully represented conventional farming on the committee, and said its members came to the table in good faith, and sat through some occasionally ugly times.

Ross, a relative newcomer to Lake County, said he shared Scully's pro-farmer attitude. He said that there are many conflicting messages about GE crops, from the promises farmers receive about them to the messages consumers get about potential health risks. He said the committee did its best to come from both perspectives and meet in the middle.

Because of the fast changes in technology, Ross suggested the registration process should be appraised within two to three years, not five.

Agricultural Commissioner Steve Hajik said he wanted guidance from the board on how to apply the rules.

Specifically, he said he read the regulations to mean that if a GE crop already was being grown in an area, nearby organic growers can't complain and, on the other hand, if an organic grower already is in operation, a GE crop can't be grown within the buffer zone.

That's based on the "first in time, first in right approach," which committee member Broc Zoller later said is part of California seed law.

Community member Cedar Moss didn't understand the need for privacy, which board members said came out of concerns for vandalism and property damage.

Moss said they should take the chance to ban GE crops. Once the cows are out of the barn, it's hard to get them back in, she said. "You have a situation where they're not out yet."

Zoller told the board that if they look at accepting nondetectable gene flow levels, "you're talking about a ban."

Supervisor Denise Rushing said she's sure there is something in the document for everyone to be unhappy about, and admitted there were parts she also didn't like, but nonetheless found it "extraordinary" that the committee had put a recommendation on the table.

Rushing said she had wanted to avoid the divisiveness to the community that would result from a ballot measure.

She said she wondered if coexistence between organic and GE crops is possible. "This may not be the ultimate solution for GE crops, but it might be a step in the direction of learning how to work together," she said, adding, "I don't think we can legislate a change in consciousness."

Supervisor Jeff Smith moved to disband the committee that made the proposal, which the board approved 5-0.

Before voting to send the document forward to the county counsel to be crafted into an ordinance, they removed paragraph nine on the five-year revisiting of the process, agreed to keep the new registration monitoring committee's membership at five and accepted the buffer zones at the higher de minimus standard. They also directed staff to come back with more details on program costs.

"We won't say yes to the ordinance until we know the cost," said Rushing.

March told the board that the California Crop Improvement Association charges \$2.50 an acre for 40 acres or more for its seed verification program.

Rushing moved to accept the proposal with the proposed changes, which the board accepted 5-0.

**E-mail Elizabeth Larson at [el Larson@lakeconews.com](mailto:el Larson@lakeconews.com) . Follow Lake County News on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/LakeCoNews> and on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Lake-County-News/143156775604?ref=mf> .**

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**No Guts!**  
written by molenski, February 09, 2010  
Leave it to most other counties to ban GE crops altogether and Lake County to lag behind in consciousness! What part of the concept GENETICALLY ENGINEERED is most appealing to you? Must be the money part. Fools!

-1

**Foods Inc.**  
written by fandango1, February 09, 2010  
The best thing I can say about our farming community is, see the movie FOOD Inc. It will open your eyes to what is really happening in our Country. The movie has been nominated for an Oscar

+0

**Guaranteed 100% Pro-GMO**  
written by Roberta, February 09, 2010  
The original 13-member committee was split 7 to 6 in favor of GMOs. That didn't work out too well - too much support for organic farmers and quality-conscious consumers.

The 7-member pared-down committee that made the recommendation was able to "reach consensus" a lot quicker because it was stacked 5 to 2 in favor of GMOs.

I predict that the 5-member cast of this farce will be:  
- Two farmers who want to grow GMOs  
- One token organic farmer who will be the lone dissenter (how depressing!)  
- GMO proponent Broc Zoller as the scientist  
- A UC Davis rep (shill?) for Big Ag. Note that UC Davis is DEPENDENT UPON FINANCIAL SUPPORT from corporations like Syngenta and Monsanto. The one who pays the piper calls the tune, especially in these trying times of budget cuts and deficits, so you can be certain that they will be pushing GMO.

+2

Monsanto, Welcome to Lake County, do as you wish with us.

**written by hbbhglenn, February 09, 2010**

I'm not sure which is scarier, the scientific horrors, or the political abuses of this monster industry, which has the stated goal of owning the patents on every seed that gets planted. Armed with this gigantic power they have devastated hundreds of thousands of farmers - an estimated 200,000 have committed suicide over the takeover and destruction of generations of seed development in India, and the bankrupting of thousands of farmers. Monsanto knows but doesn't care that their policies are killing thousands, and it is foolish to think they would care any more about us.

Our agriculture is nothing by comparison to the centuries of India's, two or three generations of farming at most, which will now be devastated if that is the wish of Monsanto.

If you doubt this, check out what they did to Percy Schmieser of Canada or the Smiths of North Dakota. Mexico has also lost centuries of corn seed development, and of course Iraq has come under Monsanto's thumb, losing centuries of development of many varieties of crops.

Hopefully we will some day have a BOS that can acquaint itself with these disturbing facts, and will care enough to stand up for our own farmers instead of for an arrogant corporate tyrant. I'm sure Denise Rushing would vote to ban a takeover of Lake County agriculture, but we need someone else on there with her.

+ 1

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It wouldn't cost a cent

**written by allen, February 09, 2010**

to ban GMOs, and it would improve Lake County's mojo with regard to the reputation of our ag products. Are their going to be RoundUp/GMO police to inspect whether or not it was applied a week before the GMO crop was harvested? Not likely. If I owned a horse, I sure as hell wouldn't give it non-organic alfalfa. You just can't be sure if it is eating alfalfa-laced with roundup or not these days without going certified organic.

+ 0

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THE COMMITTEE

**written by epasarah, February 09, 2010**

I question whether the '2' were really in a separate camp from the '5'. It's a pretty black and white issue and our '7' wanted the gmos. Pretty clear to me. So let's find some real environmentalists to move this county into a better place.

+1

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Dumb and Dumber!  
written by molenski, February 09, 2010  
Didn't the Japanese state that they were  
going to watch our babies for 20 years  
before they even look into GE crops?!

+2

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