

Committee for the Evaluation of Growing Genetically Engineered Crops in San Luis Obispo County

Report of Committee for Bob Lilley, San Luis Obispo County Agricultural Commissioner

Respectfully submitted on July 19, 2004 by committee representatives from:

California Certified Organic Farmers, San Luis Obispo Chapter
SLO GE-Free
San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau
San Luis Obispo County Health Department
San Luis Obispo County Agricultural Commissioner
University of California Cooperative Extension – Committee Facilitator

Committee Design

The following Ground Rules were approved and followed (mostly) during our meetings and in communications between committee members:

Be respectful

Be bold, be brief – be seated

Withhold judgment

Listen as an ally

Each participating organization agreed to send one representative to meetings, with designated alternates. Meetings were held weekly from April 30 through July 15, 2004 (See Appendix A for Minutes).

Committee Objectives

A review of the Board of Supervisors Minutes of 4-20-04 helped us to define expectations of our group

- What are the issues for both producers and consumers;
- Definitions are needed – biotech vs. GE; organic vs. conventional production
- Capture what's happening in the county now with GE production;
- What are the regulations?
- Impacts on local production, both conventional and organic and the impacts of regulations on the supply chain;
- What are the economic impacts?
- What is the ecological potential for drawbacks to GE production – is what we hear overstated or understated and who can tell us which one it is;
- Keep a strong education focus and factual content so that community can make their own decisions;
- Keep the content factual with rigorous scientific content, while including minority opinions.

As a result of these expectations, we adopted the following as our Committee Objectives:

“Our objectives are to provide information to the Board of Supervisors on growing genetically engineered (GE) crops in San Luis Obispo County about issues that are within their abilities to influence; to include basic information on definitions, terms, and techniques for biotechnology, genetic engineering, organic and conventional production. We will strive to deliver this information in the context of the consumers choice for locally grown produce and the producers choice for how and what they grow”.

Committee Accomplishments

There are social, moral, and ethical differences in the way GE crops are viewed. As a committee we have tried to avoid discussing these differences at a broad level and instead have tried to capture them in specific topics associated with agricultural production, economics, the environment, health, and regulatory and legal issues.

We have found it important to remember that actions by the Board of Supervisors, or by the voters, will only have impacts to crops produced within our County, and on lands under county jurisdiction. We have framed our discussion in this way.

We developed a Glossary of Terms from which to work, to provide clear definitions of terms (Appendix B). We developed a “snapshot” of current regulations at the federal, state, and local levels (Appendices C and D). We felt it important for our committee, the Board and the public to understand the certification process for organic production. That information can be found in Appendix E. Health concerns were one of the important issues identified by committee members. Information on health implications are included in Appendix F.

With this background information we developed an Implications Table (Appendix G). With this Table, we are “framing” the question or questions surrounding the production of genetically engineered crops as best we can and hoping that, as a result, public discourse will focus on the issues and not on the personalities of those with strong positions on those issues. In organizing the table, the committee highlighted a number of areas and questions that one or more members felt was important. Not everything brought forth was included for reasons of time and expertise, but there was a consensus as to what issues are presented therein.

Finally, we have accumulated resources from all committee members that might be used by both the Board and the public in understanding the processes of genetic engineering and the pros and cons of both introduction and exclusion of GE crops into San Luis Obispo County. These resources are included at the end of the Implications Table.

Our committee looks forward to having our work presented to the Board and to the public on August 3rd.

Submitted on behalf of the committee by Mary Bianchi, UCCE, 19 July, 2004.