

# USDA see-saws on biotech crop policies

By ACSH Staff — December 20, 2010

If enacted, a [new proposed policy by the U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) <sup>[1]</sup> (USDA) would restrict where and how genetically modified (GM) crops may be grown. This would be a significant and troubling shift for the agency. The USDA appears to be responding to protests from anti-biotech activists and organic farmers. Currently in the process of considering the approval of GM alfalfa, the USDA might impose limitations on how the crop is farmed in order to ensure it doesn't contaminate non-biotech crops. According to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, however, the agency has not yet come to a final decision about this.

But these new restrictions would add an unnecessary burden to farmers, says Russell Williams, a director for the American Farm Bureau Federation.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross is upset that Mr. Vilsack seems to be vacillating in his regulatory approach toward GM crops. "First, he fervently advocates the safety and utility of biotech alfalfa and sugar beets against activists, and now all of a sudden, he's saying that the USDA may limit where biotech crops may be planted. This must be at the behest of organic farmers because they are afraid GM seeds might contaminate their fields — and then they couldn't market their crops as 'GM-free.' This is seeking to find a solution without a problem, and is a dangerous shift towards the excess of precaution we noted in the FDA, and which has caused biotech agriculture to come to a virtual halt in Europe."

Both an article in *The Wall Street Journal* and Dr. Ross point out that the vast majority of corn, soybeans, cotton and sugar beets grown in this country are GM. "Millions of acres of farmland have yielded millions of tons of GM crops, in the U.S. and worldwide, without a single instance anywhere of documented adverse effects on humans, animals or the environment," says Dr. Ross.

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[1]

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