

Rossland says no to GE plants

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Rossland doesn't want genetically engineered plants and trees in their municipality.

On May 11, 2009, the City of Rossland took leadership on this controversial issue by passing a resolution to oppose the cultivation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

The resolution, moved by Councillor Laurie Charlton and seconded by Jill Spearn, stated that Rossland opposes GMOs and will not purchase any for their own use. The matter was brought to the attention of Rossland city council by the regional G.E Free Kootenays campaign, a sub-group of the Kootenay Food Strategy Society.

"This decision helps our campaign move forward as we will now look to bring other local governments on board," said G.E. Free Kootenays' Rossland representative Andy Morel, who has been involved in the organization since its inception in November 2007.

Many members of the organization refer to GMOs as "Frankenfood."

Morel said the average Rosslander probably consumes a genetically engineered food product every day. Foods such as cereal, potato chips, fruit juices, cookies and any processed food product with corn or soy is likely to have genetically engineered components.

"There are a myriad of by-products hidden in our food that the average person just doesn't know about," said Morel.

Morel said the biggest concern is that we haven't yet properly studied the effects this food will have.

G.E Free Kootenays is concerned that GMOs will negatively impact human and environmental health. They also believe there has been inadequate regulating by health and food authorities and uncontrollable contamination between genetically altered and normal crops.

"I'm not an expert. I'm just an advocate of organic foods and organic farming," said Morel.

He added there is lots of information online for anyone interested in learning more about the controversy surrounding GMOs.

Morel encouraged people to buy organic or certified organic food and suggested even planting your own garden in your backyard.

“Most Canadians, and people in general, don’t know anything about this. It’s best to just be cautious.”

The entire EU has banned genetically altered plants and trees, but North America is yet to get on board.

The Regional District of Powell River became the first GMO free zone in the country in 2004, followed by Saltspring Island the same year. The City of Nelson was the first district in the Kootenay region to join the G.E Free Kootenays campaign, in November 2008.

“The efforts in the Kootenays is one of the most organized but this is going on everywhere,” said Morel.

Since being introduced in the mid-90s, GMOs have steadily increased their presence in North America’s food supply. To help promote farmer independence and community food sovereignty, G.E Free Kootenays believe the spread of genetically altered plants needs to be stopped.

Morel said the idea behind these modified crops was noble, but lacked in execution. While the crops were originally advertised as having a better yield and a superior quality, Morel said that simply isn’t the case. As well, the use of pesticides, herbicides and insecticides further sullies the quality of the food.

Though the resolution passed by council did not include any bylaw on cultivation or any restriction for grocery stores or restaurants, G.E Free Kootenays believes that having a political power behind their movement will help educate residents and mobilize opponents to the spread of these potentially dangerous plants and trees.