



# National Organic Coalition

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## NOC MEMBERS

Beyond Pesticides

Center for Food Safety

Equal Exchange

Food & Water Watch

Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services

National Cooperative Grocers Association

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance

Northeast Organic Farming Association - Interstate Council

Organic Seed Alliance

Organically Grown Company

Rural Advancement Foundation International -USA

Union of Concerned Scientists

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### National Organic Coalition Condemns Misguided USDA Advisory Committee's Biotechnology Report and Recommendations

Report available at:

[http://www.usda.gov/documents/ac21\\_report-enhancing-coexistence.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/documents/ac21_report-enhancing-coexistence.pdf)

*AC21 report recommends GE contaminated farmers pay for insurance to compensate themselves for unwanted GE contamination*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.--November 20, 2012--**The National Organic Coalition (NOC) today sharply condemned recommendations contained in the final [report](#) of the [Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture \(AC21\)](#), a group appointed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to address transgenic contamination of organic and non-genetically engineered (GE) crops. Of particular concern in the report is the recommendation that organic and non-GE conventional farmers pay for crop insurance or self-insure themselves against unwanted GE contamination. NOC strongly asserts that this proposal allows USDA and the agricultural biotechnology industry to abdicate responsibility for preventing GE contamination while making the victim of GE pollution pay for damages resulting from transgenic contamination.

"The AC21 report takes responsibility for GE contamination prevention out of the hands of USDA and the biotech industry where it belongs and puts it squarely on the backs of organic and non-GE farmers," said Andrew Kimbrell, executive director at Center for Food Safety and a NOC member. "This ill-conceived solution of penalizing the victim is fundamentally unjust and fails to address the root cause of the problem - transgenic contamination."

In August 2011, USDA convened AC21 and charged it with identifying compensation mechanisms to address GE contamination. The underlying assumption of USDA's work plan for the committee was that as long as farmers are adequately compensated, GE contamination is a permissible and acceptable cost of doing business for organic and non-GE farmers. NOC has rejected this assumption, as did several members of the AC21. True to its charge, the committee's final report failed to make a single recommendation holding the patent holders of genetic engineering technologies responsible and liable for damages caused by its use.

"This is a completely wrong approach to tackling the GE contamination problem," said, Liana Hoodes, NOC's executive director. "At the bare minimum, USDA must stop

approving additional GE crops, and prevent GE contamination by mandating pollution prevention measures, as well as make transgenic polluters, including GE technology owners, pay for their contamination."

Contamination from GE crops can cause both economic and social harms to farmers in the form of lost livelihood and reputation, and by compromising long-established partnerships and markets in the U.S. and elsewhere. Contamination can severely curtail or eliminate the rights of farmers to sow the crop of their choice and to practice their preferred method of farming. It can also limit a farmer's ability to collect and preserve non-GE, identity preserved and organic seeds.

According to NOC, an additional shortcoming of the report is the recommendation that GE and non-GE farmer neighbors develop "co-existence agreements" as a means of moderating relationships in light of inevitable contamination. However, "co-existence" indicates some form of equality or a level playing in the situation. This is not the case. It is clear that organic and non-GE farmers are the clear losers under these conditions, as GE contamination precludes them from growing the crops of their choice. Moreover, the recommendation ignores the real-life issues farmers face, including absentee landowners, unwilling or uninformed neighbors, and the power and money backing biotech growers.

"Floating the pie-in-the-sky idea of farmer co-existence agreements is an obvious diversion from the critical issues non-GE farmers routinely confront with respect to GE contamination," said Ed Maltby, executive director of Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance and NOC member. "We urgently need meaningful regulatory change that institutionalizes mandatory GE contamination prevention practices. USDA needs to stop dragging its heels, get serious and focus on making this happen."

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#### **About NOC:**

The National Organic Coalition, (NOC) is a national alliance of organizations representing farmers, environmentalists, other organic industry members, and consumers concerned about the integrity of national organic standards. The goal of the coalition is to assure that organic integrity is maintained, that consumers' confidence is preserved, and that policies are fair, equitable and encourage diversity of participation and access.

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[Rural Advancement Foundation International -USA](#)  
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#### **NOC's submissions to the AC21 committee:**

[NOC Letter to Secretary Vilsack on AC21, November 2012](#)  
[FWW Comments to USDA/AC21 Committee on Biotechnology, August 2012](#)  
[NOC Comments to USDA/AC21 Committee on Biotechnology, August 2012](#)  
[MOSES Comments to USDA/AC21 Committee on Biotechnology, August 2012](#)  
[Beyond Pesticides Comments to USDA/AC21 Committee on Biotechnology, August 2012](#)  
[Center for Food Safety Comments to USDA/AC21 Committee on Biotechnology, August 2012](#)  
[Organic Seed Alliance Comments to USDA/AC21 Committee on Biotechnology, August 2012](#)