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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 21, 2007

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Huffman Bill Seeks to Safeguard Farmers, Consumers and the Environment from Genetic Contamination

Assemblymember introduces the Food and Farm Protection Act

Sacramento- Assemblymember Jared Huffman (6th AD) introduced AB 541 to protect farmers and the food supply from problems associated with genetic engineering in agriculture.

“California has no current laws in place governing GE crops,” said Assemblymember Huffman. “It is the responsibility of the legislature to address this issue now to safeguard the economic strength and vitality of California as a worldwide agricultural leader.”

The Food and Farm Protection Act (AB 541) protects farmers and landowners by establishing their right to compensation for economic losses suffered due to genetic contamination of their crops, and it puts a GE crop registration process in place. The bill also protects the food supply by prohibiting the open-air cultivation of food crops genetically engineered to produce pharmaceutical drugs.

“Contamination by GE crops can impact both organic and conventional farmers who have customers that reject GE foods,” said Peggy Miars, Executive Director of California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF). “It’s only fair that they be entitled to recover damages such as lost markets and the costs of testing and cleanup.”

Currently there is no ability for nearby farmers, other landowners or even government officials to learn the locations of experimental GE field trials. AB xx requires GE researchers and producers to register with the county if they intend to plant GE crops. “This bill seeks to protect organic farmers from the potentially devastating effects of contamination of their fields by GE crops which could be close to their farms without their knowledge,” said Samantha Cabaluna, Director of Communications for Earthbound Farm, a Central Coast grower and shipper of organic produce.

The bill comes in the wake of an economically disastrous contamination of the food supply last summer by an unapproved variety of GE rice in the Southern U.S. The discovery caused an immediate drop of at least \$150 million in rice futures, and important export markets including Japan, South Korea and Europe shut down. Forty farmers have sued the GE rice manufacturer, Bayer CropScience, for economic damages, but they may never recover some of their lost markets. In a just-released study of California rice markets it was reported that up to 40% of California’s rice product valued at more than \$200 million is vulnerable to GE contamination.