



# CCOF

Organic Certification Trade Association Education & Outreach Political Advocacy



## For Immediate Release

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## California's GMO Bill Approved by Senate Ag Committee *Bill Would Protect Farmers from Monsanto's Harassment*

June 9, 2008 - AB 541 is one step closer to becoming California's first state law protecting farmers from the hazards of genetically engineered crops. Having already passed the Assembly, it passed out of the Senate Agriculture Committee on June 5th. It has the support of Community Alliance with Family Farmers, the California Farmers Union, California Certified Organic Farmers, the California Farm Bureau, the California Cotton Ginners and Growers Associations, and many food safety and environmental organizations.

Introduced by Assembly Member Jared Huffman (6<sup>th</sup> AD) early in 2007 as a comprehensive bill to address many aspects of the problems associated with genetic engineering (GE) contamination, the bill was held over in the Agriculture Committee in April. Since then, AB 541 has been scaled back to address two provisions related to farmer protections.

AB 541 will enact protections for California farmers against frivolous lawsuits that intimidate and harass those who have not been able to prevent the inevitable – the drift of GE pollen or seed. It will level the playing field for farmers accused by agricultural biotechnology companies and other patent holders of contract violations, and discourage the practice of biotech companies sampling crops without explicit permission from farmers and prosecuting based on unverifiable testing results.

Specifically, the newly amended bill would provide for:

1. Protection from patent infringement lawsuits for farmers unknowingly contaminated by GE crops. Currently, farmers with crops that become contaminated by patented seeds or pollen have been the target of such lawsuits without clear recourse or defense.
2. The establishment of a mandatory crop sampling protocol to be used by patent holders when investigating farmers they believe may have violated patents or seed contracts. This protocol would require the farmer's written permission for sampling, and provide for a state agriculture official to accompany the patent holder during the sampling and collect duplicate samples for independent verification if requested by either party.

"I am very pleased that the stakeholders on this issue have found a way to address one of the issues related to genetic contamination of crops," stated Assembly Member Huffman. "While there is still work to do on other issues concerning genetic engineering contamination, AB 541 would be an important step in establishing basic protections for California's farmers."

“While AB 541 as currently amended represents only a small piece of what our stakeholders identify as issues to be addressed, we think this represents a move in the right direction,” stated Renata Brillinger, director of the Genetic Engineering Policy Project, the 13-member coalition of organic and conventional farmers, food industry, environmental, and faith organizations sponsoring AB 541.

The bill will be heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee on June 24<sup>th</sup> and then the full Senate.

#### About CCOF

*CCOF (California Certified Organic Farmers), a nonprofit organization, was founded in 1973 and is one of the nation’s oldest and largest third-party organic certifying agencies. CCOF certifies, educates, advocates and promotes organic in California and elsewhere through:*

- *A premier organic certification program for growers, processors, handlers, and retailers.*
- *Programs to increase awareness of and demand for certified organic products and to expand public support for organic agriculture.*
- *Advocacy for governmental policies that protect and encourage organic agriculture.*