

**Journal Pioneer (Summerside, PEI)**  
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**Letter-to-the-Editor**

## Don't be fooled by the biotech industry

Biotech promoter David Dennis recently wrote: ("Biotechnology the solution to preventing fish kills," July 29, 2002) "If farmers were allowed to grow and, if McCains would buy, potatoes containing the Bt gene .... the need for spraying would be greatly reduced, if not eliminated."

The reason McCains doesn't want to buy genetically manipulated potatoes is clear no one wants to eat these unnatural, untested crops.

As far as the safety of Monsanto's potatoes are concerned, Mr. Dennis is clearly ignorant to the facts. To state that the "Bt protein has been thoroughly tested and is harmless to people" is patent nonsense and is a disservice to readers of the Journal Pioneer.

The reality is that Health Canada and the CFIA do no testing whatsoever. That is left to Monsanto and the food biotech industry. The federal government simply reviews data submitted by the biotech companies. Canadians aren't even allowed to inspect the biotech industry's data, as it is classified as "confidential business information." Worse yet, there has never been long-term testing carried out on any of the crops currently approved for use in Canada including Bt potatoes! The reality is, no one knows if these genetically engineered crops are safe for people or the environment.

Documents recently obtained through access-to-information by Earth Action, the PEI environmental activist group, show that even as the Government of PEI and Monsanto were pushing genetically engineered Bt potatoes on the Ukrainian government back in 1998, questions remained regarding potential allergenicity of the spuds.

Mr. Dennis hurts science and agriculture with his propaganda. Unless PEI farmers want to grow potentially dangerous crops crops that no one in the world wants to buy -- I'd suggest they ignore the advice of this biotech industry spokesperson.

SIGNED

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## Confusing the Issue

Robert Wagner attempts to convey the false impression ("Bt Bacteria is the best alternative to pesticides," Sept.6, 2002) that Bt powder used by organic farmers and genetically engineered (GE) Bt potatoes are one in the same.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Bt powder is used sparingly by organic farmers, whereas the Bt potato is genetically engineered so that every cell of the unnatural spud produces the Bt toxin 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. These little killing machines definitely kill potato beetles, but they also kill a lot of other insects, some of which are beneficial. Islanders might remember that engineered Bt corn was found to kill Monarch Butterflies. More worrying, GE spuds are alive, and are therefore unpredictable and inherently more dangerous than chemical (pesticide) pollution. They reproduce, migrate, mutate, proliferate -- you can't recall them to the laboratory.

Furthermore, none of the Bt potatoes have undergone chronic (or "long-term") testing. This is fact. We therefore cannot claim that Bt potatoes are "completely safe for us" as Mr. Wagner has written. In fact, scientists in the United Kingdom observed that rats fed genetically engineered potatoes experienced "significant changes to their vital organs" including abnormal stimulation of the pancreas, intestine, prostate and testicles, liver atrophy, weakened heart and retarded brain development.

Astonishingly, data submitted by the biotech industry (inadequate as it is) is classified as "confidential" and not subject to independent scientific peer review. Considering that one of the fundamental tenets of the scientific community is peer review, this is quite astounding. The prestigious Royal Society of Canada was very critical of this in its recent report on GM food: "There is no means of determining the extent to which these information requirements are actually met during the approval process, or of assessing the degree to which the approvals are founded on scientifically rigorous information."

The reality is, no one knows if Bt potatoes are safe for people or the environment. We cannot even scientifically monitor for health or environmental effects as there is no mandatory labelling and therefore no traceability through the food system.

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Documents obtained through Access-to-Information by Ottawa researcher Ken Rubin back in 1999, exposed how the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) approved a line of Monsanto's Bt potatoes despite "extremely poor" field trials and the fact that when asked by the CFIA, Monsanto refused to provide additional information pertaining to human health. Indeed, the performance of the Bt spuds was so bad that a CFIA official feared their approval would "undermine the legitimacy of Canada's regulatory system." Another document obtained through Access to Information, by the P.E.I. environmental activist group Earth Action, shows that even as the government of P.E.I. and Monsanto were secretly pushing Monsanto's engineered potatoes on the Ukrainian government back in 1998, questions remained regarding the potential allergenicity of the spuds.

Bt potatoes won't bring solutions, just more problems. With so much scientific uncertainty, farmers would be well advised to avoid these potentially dangerous, unwanted potatoes.

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**Letter-to-the-Editor Re: "Bt potato solution to fish kills: Kingston scientist"  
(September 23)**

## Don't Be Fooled By The Biotech Industry

Island media has been filled lately with glowing testimonials to the miracle of genetically engineered Bt potatoes, all shimmery and dreamy in their promise to solve the fish kill problem, and all carefully orchestrated by the ag-biotech industry and their public relations machinery.

The latest piece by Jana Hemphill was no exception.

It repeated several tired and discredited claims from bio-industrialists like David Dennis, including these: consumer concerns about genetically modified foods are a result of the fear-mongering of certain "special interest" groups, and nothing more. Transgenic gene insertion is no different than traditional plant breeding -- it's just faster. Using Monsanto's Bt spud (where every cell of the plant was engineered to produce the toxin 24 hours a day, seven days a week) is no different than the occasional use of Bt spray by organic farmers.

In a nutshell, Islanders are being asked to believe that if we'd only let Dr. Monsanto cross the Confederation Bridge, our fishies will be saved. When pondering this, Islanders might ask themselves why the same industry that brings us the chemicals responsible for the recent fish kills is now offering a miracle "solution" to its own products? Or why an industry so interested in the public good has spent a fortune lobbying the federal government to not require mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods?

Consumers are skeptical about these products and their inventors for good reasons. Island farmers should be as well.

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**Charlottetown Guardian**

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**Letter to the Editor, Re: "Bt technology could cut use of insecticides," (Sept. 27)**

# Don't Trust The Biotech Industry

David Dennis, biotech industry CEO, would have Islanders believe that "GM crops are the most successful of any new agricultural technology."

Mr. Dennis certainly has an interesting definition of "success." My definition of success would not entail foreign markets closed to GM crops, and overwhelming public concern about the lack of traceability and absence of mandatory labelling of these unnatural products.

Mr. Dennis cites a 'study' from the National Center for Food and Agricultural Policy as proof, without disclosing the fact that the organization it is funded by the Council for Biotechnology Information, the principal lobby group of the food biotech industry in North America. Readers might know CBI from their dreamy television commercials and magazine inserts, beckoning us all to the better world that their biotech products will create.

The reality is, no one knows if Monsanto's Bt potatoes are safe for people or the environment. As pointed out by the Royal Society of Canada, none of these spuds have ever undergone chronic (long-term) testing. We cannot even scientifically monitor for health or environmental effects, as there is no mandatory labelling and therefore no traceability through the food system. Worse yet, GM crops are alive and therefore unpredictable and inherently more dangerous than chemical (pesticide) pollution. GM crops reproduce, migrate, mutate, proliferate -- you can't recall them to the laboratory.

Consumers are concerned and farmers should be too.

SIGNED

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