

LOW LEVEL PRESENCE POLICIES CRITICAL TO UNINTERRUPTED TRADE FLOW

According to Lorne Hepworth, president of CropLife Canada, "The time is now for Canada to adopt a low level presence policy for genetically modified crops and advocate for other countries to do the same."

There's an enormous infrastructure dedicated to moving grain from farms to consumers around the world. But even the most sophisticated infrastructure can't prevent different crops from potentially coming into contact with one another.

Trade disruptions with major implications

In 2009, a shipment of soybeans from Canada was put into quarantine before it could enter Europe, which has a zero-tolerance policy for traces of unapproved GM products. Dust particles of GM corn, which is fully approved for consumption in Canada, made it into the shipment of soybeans somewhere in the transportation process.

"Trace levels of GM crops approved in one or more countries should not be impeding the movement of much-needed commodities around the world."

Last year, shipments of flax travelling from Canada to the European Union (EU) were halted because trace amounts of Triffid – a GM form of the crop approved in Canada and the U.S. but never commercialized – were found.

"The adverse impacts of this have been profound," says Dennis Stephens, executive director of the Canada Grains Council. "There were layoffs and major disruptions – all of which resulted in financial losses."

These aren't issues of safety, they're issues of regulation. Triffid underwent a thorough review by Canada's world-renowned regulatory system and was approved for consumption at 100 per cent levels. The trace amounts, equivalent to one seed in ten thousand, found in the flax shipments to Europe posed no reasonable threat to safety.

Zero tolerance not practical

Zero-tolerance policies are not realistic. "Detection technology has become so incredibly fine-tuned that one flax seed in a sea of 10,000 is detectable. Trace levels of GM crops approved in one or more countries should not be impeding the movement of much-needed commodities around the world," says Hepworth.

The number of biotech products on the market is expected to increase four-fold globally in the next decade.

"Once a new event is approved for food, feed and production, it's not a matter of if it will show up in trace amounts in unintended products, it's what day it will show up," says Stephens.

Since countries don't currently have dedicated LLP policies, they automatically default to zero-tolerance, despite the fact a substance in question has been fully assessed and approved by another regulatory body.

As it stands, Canada has what can be considered a zero-tolerance policy on LLP. When trace amounts of a substance that is unapproved in Canada but approved in the country where it's being imported from appear in a shipment, authorities must perform a risk assessment before allowing its entry. According to the current policy, products are only permitted to enter the country if they are either fully approved in Canada or contain zero traces of an unapproved product.

Working towards a Canadian solution

The Grains Innovation Roundtable (GIRT) Trade Policy working group in Canada is working with regulators to establish a transparent, predictable and efficient process for dealing with LLP. To repeat a risk assessment already done by another competent authority puts an unnecessary burden on the system.

According to Trish Jordan, chair, Council for Biotechnology Information Canada, "Canada stands to be a world leader in the development of an LLP policy but we must first have a policy in place before we can advocate for similar policies in other countries."



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Low Level Presence (LLP) defined:

LLP is the incidental presence of minute amounts of a genetically modified (GM) material that has been approved in one country but not in the country that is importing the product.

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