



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & RURAL RESOURCES
BOARD OF PESTICIDES CONTROL
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PRESS RELEASE

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Bt Corn—Coming To Maine?

AUGUSTA—Currently, Maine is the only state in the US where *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) corn cannot be sold or grown. However, on July 27, the State of Maine, specifically the Maine Board of Pesticides Control (BPC), will be considering whether to approve the registration of this genetically modified grain and allow its planting in Maine agriculture. Deliberations began when three biotech companies—Dow AgroSciences, Pioneer Hi-Bred International, and Monsanto—submitted applications to register seven Bt field corn products (feed for animals) in March.

Understanding the importance of complete transparency in these matters, the BPC wants to be certain the word gets out about this discussion. “We want the public to be informed in this matter, so that no one is surprised, no matter what the outcome,” says Board member Clyde Walton. “Board meetings are open to the public, and all are invited to come and listen to the proceedings, if they so desire.” While the next Board meeting is not a public hearing, all Board meetings provide an opportunity for limited public comment.

Bt corn has been genetically modified to produce plant-incorporated protectants (PIPs), in this case the pesticidal proteins from the naturally occurring soil-borne Bt bacteria that kill certain insects (with corn, the target insects are foliar-feeding caterpillars and soils pests such as cutworms and rootworms). This makes Bt corn a pesticide and, in Maine, all pesticides must be registered and approved by the BPC before they can be sold or used.

In 1994, the BPC decided it would undertake technical reviews of PIPs to look for potential adverse effects on human health and potential development of insect resistance. These reviews were conducted in 1997 after receipt of applications to register three Bt corn products. The human health review concluded there were no concerns, and a process was established to identify any development of insect resistance. However, the registrations were denied because Maine’s Pesticide Statute requires that there be a demonstrated need/benefit for the products, and there was no such information available at that time.

In the last decade, several biotech companies have made inquiries into the PIP registration process in Maine. However, it has only been in the last five months that registration requests have been fully pursued by three

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companies. During this same time, the Board has been gathering information at each of its meetings from interested parties on topics such as economic need and a technical advisory committee was established to evaluate the potential for pollen drift and resistance issues.

During the recent Board meetings, supporters of Bt corn stated that the technology reduces pesticide use while effectively addressing key pest problems, increases yield, and requires fewer trips through the field. They also indicated that the highest-yielding varieties are now only available as Bt corn. These corn growers also said they feel they are at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the country, by not being able to grow Bt corn. In addition, where the early products were effective only against foliar-feeding caterpillars, the newer products work against a broader range of insects, including soil pests such as cutworms and rootworms. Supporters, therefore, said growing Bt corn would reduce the amount of soil insecticides used.

At the same meetings, opponents of Bt corn voiced concerns about insects developing resistance to Bt, since, in spray form, Bt is an important tool for organic growers. Other concerns mentioned were the potential contamination of non-Bt corn crops from pollen drift and liability issues when non-Bt crops are contaminated. Based on the relative cost of Bt corn seed, opponents also questioned the economics.

The BPC wants the public to understand that genetically modified, herbicide-tolerant crops, including Roundup Ready® canola, corn, and soybeans, and LibertyLink® corn have been legally grown in Maine for at least a decade. These crops do not have to be registered by the Board because they do not contain a pesticide, but in most cases have been bred to be resistant to the use of common herbicides. In addition, everyone should recognize that a high percentage of food products imported into the state have been produced from genetically modified plants.

The next Board meeting, where Bt corn is expected to be on the agenda, will take place at the Hampton Inn in Waterville, on July 27 at 9:30 AM. For more information, including the complete agenda and directions, go to www.thinkfirstspraylast.org.

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The Maine Board of Pesticides Control (BPC) is the lead state agency for pesticide regulation. It is an administrative unit of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources with policy decisions made by a seven-member, public board. The BPC is creator of "YardScaping," a statewide program that recognizes the connection between backyards and watersheds, and calls for Maine citizens to make lawn care choices that don't compromise the environment or the beauty of their lawn.