

## USDA urges consideration of GMO crop insurance; Organic farmers howl

The [USDA Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture](#) just released report, "[Enhancing Coexistence](#)," concludes that the agency should consider launching a crop insurance pilot program for farmers harmed by cross-pollination from transgenic (genetically modified) crops.

The goal, the panel wrote, would be for farmers to develop "joint coexistence plans" with neighboring growers. If the USDA decides a compensation mechanism is needed, the report said it should be based on the model of existing crop insurance programs.

The panel was clearly split over the risks of the cross-pollination threat. "Members recognize that there are unintended (genetically engineered) materials found in commercial products, but differ in their assessment of the significance of unintended presence, the severity of economic harm and whether such occurrences are increasing, decreasing or remaining the same," the report said.

The organics lobby led by the [National Organics Coalition](#) and the Center for Food Safety [condemned the report](#), claiming it encouraged genetic engineering, which they claim harms the environment and poses health hazards, and would be costly for anti-GMO farmers. "Of particular concern in the report is the recommendation that organic and non-GE conventional farmers pay to self-insure themselves against unwanted GE contamination," said a statement issued by the National Organic Coalition.

"This proposal allows USDA and the agricultural biotechnology industry to abdicate responsibility for preventing GE contamination while making the victims of GE pollution pay for damages resulting from transgenic contamination," it said.

Organic and some conventional farmers critical of GMOs claim that Monsanto or other corporations that produce genetically modified seeds could sue farmers for patent infringement if GM seeds drifted onto their farms.

"Any farmer/seed grower contaminated will not want to disclose the contamination because they are illegally in possession of a patented material and could be subject to legal action for theft of intellectual property. The committee refused to ever recognize this fact," noted Isaura Andaluz, executive director of agricultural nonprofit [Cuatro Puertas](#).

There is no case on record in which a farmer has been sued in the case of unintended cross-pollination. The committee reviewed Andaluz's hypothetical and concluded there is no legal basis for believing such suits would or could be filed.

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