

GMO skeptic leery of organic-GMO 'coexistence'

When Robert Frost first coined his oft-quoted wisdom that “good fences make good neighbors,” he clearly failed to anticipate the era of genetically modified organisms blowing across America’s agricultural landscape.

Adding good policy to supplement good fences is proving to remain controversial, with organic producers sitting by in limbo, trying to guarantee the purity of their products in a world replete with GMOs.

It’s telling, for example, that one of the debates is even called “coexistence.”

That debate can be found among more than 4,500 comments about coexistence of GMO crops with organic agriculture that have poured in to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, a section of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that oversees genetically engineered organisms under research and development.

And the comment period remains open — the government has granted several extensions, and the latest deadline is May 11.

Patty Lovera, assistant director of Food & Water Watch, a nonprofit advocacy group, said the ascension of organic ag has forced the USDA to bend to pressure and try to figure out how organics can coexist with genetically engineered crops.

“They’ve been kind of forced to this conversation, but they’re still pretty agnostic,” Lovera said.

Proponents of regulation want large companies that hold seed patents to be held responsible for contamination, not the neighboring farmers who buy those GMO seeds.

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service added, “On the other hand, a comment supported by the American Farm Bureau, the Biotechnology Industry Organization, and several other grower and trade group stated that coexistence is already working and supported the view that education could continue to promote coexistence.”

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