Lawsuit Against Syngenta Brings Up Different Questions About GMO Production

By Katie Clausen
The Plain Talk

Agriculture is an ever changing environment.

Global food demand is increasing constantly, and by genetically changing our crops, farmers are able to grow larger amounts of food on smaller amounts of land. Historically, humans have been changing the traits of crops by breeding them to strains of plants that had desirable characteristics. As technologies have advanced, this can be done quickly in a laboratory setting, while also using characteristics from other species.

On Sept 12 2014, Cargill field a lawsuit against seed manufacturer Syngenta in a Louisiana state court with the intent to seek damages from an incident where exported corn was rejected by China, due to being an unrecognized GMO.

Genetically modified organisms, commonly referred to as GMO's, are a controversial subject. Roughly 90 percent of the corn, cotton, soybeans, sugar beets and canola grown in the United States are GMO crops.

It is no secret that organic and non-organic crops have made a huge splash in the marketplace. Consumers are now able to come to their own conclusions on what types of food products are best for their family by looking at and interpreting research. Organic produce comes at a premium price, but is very available at most grocery stores. Public and private regulatory researchers have come to both the defense and disfavor of GMO crops internationally.

Although there are many realms of plant traits, health and characteristics that can be expressed through genetically modifying an organism, many of the GMO's in the United States are manufactured because of their resistance to certain insects. This translates to growers having to use less pesticides, which reduces pesticide residues in foods. Along with pest tolerance often comes larger yields and healthier plants.

While GMO's have been deemed safe by the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association and the U.S. National Academy of Science, which claim consuming GMO crops is no different those that have been altered by more traditional but time consuming methods like breeding, countries across the world have their own approval methods and feelings on GMOs. Plants with certain traits have the capacity to both help and harm different areas of the environment. Recently commodity giant Cargill has filed a lawsuit against GMO seed manufacturer and biotechnology company, Syngenta.

"Unlike other seed companies, Syngenta has not practiced responsible stewardship by broadly commercializing a new product before receiving approval from a key export market like China," said Mark Stonacek, president of Cargill Grain & Oilseed Supply Chain North America in a press release. "Syngenta also put the ability of U.S. agriculture to serve global markets at risk, costing both Cargill and the entire U.S. agricultural industry significant damages."

In 2013, a commodity price crash led to record decreases in the dollar value of U.S. corn. Looking at the larger picture, some felt that part of the reason for this downfall was that China had rejected loads of U.S. corn. The reason for this rejection was the finding of not yet approved Syngenta GMO corn, referred to in the trade as Agrisure Viptera.

Cargill, however, is still a proponent of GMO technology and the potential it has in the marketplace and world food system.

In the eyes of the lawsuit and according to its supporters Viptera corn caused such a backlash in the market that it drove the price of corn downward causing hardships to farmers who had spent top dollar on input prices.

While Syngenta's pull in the marketplace makes barge loads of U.S. corn getting rejected feel unnecessary and financially damaging, many economic factors are at play in the commodity markets. Initially, an influx in grain and record breaking yields drove the supply model downward, creating a lower market. The corn market in the United States is dependent on many factors such as supply, demand, ethanol production, livestock production, changes in weather, and fluctuations in the international markets.

"Syngenta believes that the lawsuit is without merit and strongly upholds the right of growers to have access to approved new technologies that can increase both their productivity and their profitability," Syngenta released in a statement on its website.

Syngenta's information shows that the trait was, in fact, approved for cultivation in the United States in 2010, and had been approved in the U.S. by meeting all regulatory requirements.

According to Monsanto, one of the largest producers of GMOs, historically over 319 traits in 25 types of crops have been approved across the globe. Over 50 countries have had their own regulatory agencies approve these traits. In fact, the purpose of some GMOs is to increase the health and wellbeing of human lives, by increasing vitamin and nutrient content in food, increase drought tolerance, and resist insects. Crops such as these could be lifesaving in developing countries that have broken agriculture systems and widespread malnourishment.

While everyone is entitled to their own opinion on GMO crops and the future of our global agri-economy, it is none the less important to weigh in on all of our options. Agriculture, in general, pulls from our ecological balance while being absolutely critical to our economy. As Norman Bourlaug, Nobel Peace Prize recipient known as the father of the Green Revolution once said, "There are no miracles in agriculture production."

THE EXCELLENCE OF THE SOUTH DAKOTA NATIONAL GUARD

A COLUMN BY GOV. DENNIS DAUGAARD:

As the commander-in-chief of the South Dakota National Guard, I know well the role the National Guard plays in defending our nation and responding to domestic emergencies here in our state. I've witnessed their service firsthand while visiting members in Kuwait and Afghanistan, and I appreciated their service when they were called to respond to emergencies here at home.

Not long after I came into office, the Missouri River flooded. Though we received very little notice, the National Guard was ready to respond. In a matter of hours, soldiers arrived on the scene to help with sandbagging, traffic management, levee construction and patrols. Nearly 2,000 Guardsmen came to affected communities to help with the response, and they worked for 96 continuous days in 12- to 15-hour shifts.

For this and all other major weather disasters we've faced over the past five years – the 2012 drought, Winter Storm Atlas, flooding along the Missouri and Big Sioux, and the Wessington Springs tornado – the National Guard has been there to lend a hand to South Dakotans.

Beyond responding to disasters here at home, many of our National Guard soldiers have served abroad. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the National Guard has deployed more than 7,200 soldiers and airmen overseas and at home in support of the Global War on Terror. Right now, for the first time in a decade, none of our National Guard soldiers or airmen are currently deployed overseas.

That will change in May, when the 114 Fighter Wing will deploy to the Pacific Theater. South Dakotans stand in support of the 250 airmen of that unit and we are grateful for their commitment to answer the call of duty abroad. It is because of their sacrifice and the sacrifices made by others who have served that we are free. Thanks to them, we live in a place where we have freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, and more.

The soldiers and airmen of the South Dakota National Guard are some of the most dedicated, capable, and reliable men and women I've ever known. For over 153 years, this leading force has been dedicated to serving the citizens of South Dakota and the nation. Now more than ever, the National Guard is seeking quality men and women to be part of this professional, respected, dependable and highly-skilled force.

I encourage those looking to be a part of a winning team to join this elite organization. Be a part of the history, tradition and legacy that is our South Dakota National Guard. Visit sdguard.com for more information.

USD PROFESSOR WINS 2015 MONSIGNOR JAMES DOYLE HUMANITIES TEACHING AWARD

David Burrow, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of History at the University of South Dakota, is the 2015 recipient of the Monsignor James Doyle Humanities Teaching Award, presented by the College of Arts & Sciences.

Burrow will receive the award on April 20 at the 2015 Phi Beta Kappa initiation and Lifto Amundson Lecture.

Burrow, who joined USD in 2006, teaches courses on Russian History, the Holocaust, Nazi Germany and the Enlightenment. In all of his classes, Burrow said he emphasizes the importance of researching and interpreting primary sources, such as letters and diaries, when attempting to understand a historical period.

"By reading primary sources, students can work on interpretation and get at the complexities of a topic," Burrow said. "They're not just absorbing my view."

USD Professor David Burrow Wins 2015 Monsignor James Doyle Humanities Teaching Award
COURTESY PHOTO

This spring, students in Burrow's upper-division Holocaust class are working with primary sources not available to the general public. As part of a Holocaust digital education project that Burrow helped develop with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., history students are researching translated diaries and oral histories in which survivors documented their experience.

While the Holocaust class offers rewarding teaching experiences, Burrow said his favorite courses are those that focus on Imperial Russia, which is his area of research. "Students who take that class say I don't need notes to remember what to say. I need notes to remember to stop talking," Burrow said.

Kurt Hackemer, professor and chair of the Department of History, said students see only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Burrow's classroom activities. "Our students know that Professor Burrow is a great teacher, but they have no idea how much time and energy he invests in preparing and delivering his courses," Hackemer said. "He creates interactive and innovative experiences for them every semester, and it is a privilege to have him in our department."