CropLife CANADA
representing the plant science industry
représentant de l'industrie de la phytologie

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October 23, 2006

Mr. Jonathon Whitten
Executive Producer
CBC National
P.O. Box 500
Station A
Toronto, Ontario
M5W 1E6

Dear Mr. Whitten:

I am writing regarding an item that appeared on the CBC National News on the evening of Sept 25, 2006 – "Genetically modified foods, who knows how safe they are?" – reported by Kelly Crowe.

This journalistic piece fell short of the CBC's standard in terms of accuracy and fairness when judged against the CBC's published Journalistic Principles. Detailed below are specific examples of:

- false information,
- the use of undisciplined language, and
- a failure to reflect equitably the relevant facts and significant points of view.

Accuracy

> *Kelly Crowe (reporter):" ...Another example of genes on the loose, GM canola, growing where it wasn't planted and wasn't wanted, and now it contaminates almost the entire Canadian canola crop."*

First, it is not accurate to say that genetically modified plants have contaminated almost the entire Canadian canola crop. The fact is: 80% of Canada's canola crop is intentionally planted to GMO varieties. Given this fact, it is difficult to imagine how one would make the case that the entire canola crop has been contaminated. Farmers have clearly chosen this technology because of the benefits it provides to their production systems.

While the potential does exist for "volunteer" species in a succeeding crop, controlling volunteers is not a new problem for farmers, nor specific to GMOs. However, to help ensure that herbicide-tolerant volunteers can be readily managed, the industry has published a Best Management Practices bulletin on the subject. Similarly, to help ensure mutual sustainability – in other words, the mutual co-existence – of differing production systems (genetically engineered, conventional, or organic) in the same geographic region, the industry also published a Best Management Practices Guide on Co-existence. Both bulletins are supported by grower and other industry associations. For example, in the case of the latter bulletin, it was "endorsed and supported" by the Canadian Canola Growers Association, Canola Council of Canada, Grain Growers of Canada, Ontario Corn Producers Association, Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association, and the Canadian Seed Trade Association. This is an indication that the industry at large recognizes there are benefits of all production systems and has adopted measures to ensure they can properly coexist in the marketplace.

Fairness – undisciplined use of language

> *Kelly Crowe (reporter):*
> *"… what if the genes had contained dangerous drugs or toxic chemicals? Because one day they will."…"*
>
> *David Suzuki (a broadcaster for the CBC):*
> *"… A problem if those seeds contain a dangerous drug or chemical".*

There are no genetically modified crops in Canada that contain "dangerous" drugs or chemicals. There is also no plan to produce such products in a way that would cause harm to the environment or human safety. Indeed, without context, such characterizations mislead the viewer.

Since the beginning of time, plants have been the source of medicines for healing. Through the use of genetic engineering, we will be able to further enhance these opportunities, reduce the cost of medications, and improve the safety of vaccine production by using plants, rather than animal components currently used. Using plants that someday might be a cheap and readily available source of vaccines and medicinal drugs through genetic engineering - especially for parts of the world that do not have easy access to medical personnel, proper refrigeration, and syringes and needles - will be viewed by most as "life-saving" not "toxic" and "dangerous".

Government regulatory agencies will clearly not register a GMO trait if it is "dangerous" or "toxic". Additionally, the developers have no interest in developing a trait that is dangerous or toxic. In fact, if industry's view had been canvassed for the segment on this point, the CBC would have learned that CropLife Canada has developed a curriculum and training program for *Compliance Management of Confined Field Trials for Plant Molecular Farming in Canada*.

Any drug – or for that matter any substance – can be dangerous. This is the central axiom of the science of toxicology: "dose makes the poison". Over the counter cold

medicines, natural health products or other seemingly benign substances, taken in large enough doses can be toxic. Therefore, it is disappointing that viewers were not presented an accurate, fair and balanced perspective in this regard, rather, non-scientific based innuendo, sensationalism and scare-mongering language. The public is not well served by such journalism. This is, to quote from the CBC's Statement of Journalistic Principles, not a "disciplined use of language".

I believe there is a precedent for our complaint in this regard. The CBC Ombudsman in response (Jan 16, 2003 letter to CropLife) to a Toronto CBC TV story, introduced, with the host stating, "They're (pesticides) invisible, toxic, and deadly…" noted that "…the introduction did appear to me (the Ombudsman) to overstate the study's findings" and he further acknowledged that there was "…merit to your (CropLife's) complaint about the introduction." Also, in a CBC Radio Canada news release (September 2003) announcing a series of radio and TV programs on pesticides, sensationalist language was used, namely, "Toxic Fields" when there was no scientific evidence to support the description of farmers' fields as toxic fields.

Another example of undisciplined use of language was the quote from David Suzuki, a broadcaster for the CBC. He said, "Any politcian who tells you these products are safe and that is known through scientific testing is either very stupid or lying". It is undisciplined, and quite simply unprofessional, for a person of his stature to call people – politicians or otherwise - "stupid" and "liars".

Fairness – failure to equitably reflect significant points of view.

Viewpoint of plant biotechnology trait developers and farmers ignored

The segment also failed the test of fairness in another regard. The information reported did not reflect all the significant points of view. The industry, that is, the plant biotechnology developers' viewpoint, was not included. Nor were the farmers who grow the GMO crops.

The developers and farmers could have provided their perspective on the risks raised in the segment, and on the benefits that can accrue from the technology. Any perspective regarding the benefits of the technology was absent from the segment leading to an unfair and unbalanced piece of journalism. Farmers are the users of these technologies and have clearly adopted biotech crops in record numbers. In order to get an accurate view from farmers we would suggest that the CBC interview the Canadian Canola Growers Association, the Ontario Corn Producers Association, and the Ontario Soybean Growers Association.

While we recognize that it may be logistically difficult to provide a complete and balanced perspective in any one segment, we are not aware that the CBC productions around plant biotechnology are balanced even when viewed over a longer time horizon. We are aware of segments and shows featuring, for example, David Suzuki and Percy Schmeiser, where, like this piece, the predominant characterization of the technology was

negative. In the interest of fairness and equity, we are not aware of a similar number of productions that reported on the benefits of the technology.

Significant points of view on safety ignored

The reporter also failed to reflect equitably, significant points of view around the safety of GMO foods. One scientific journal was referenced that raised questions about the long-term safety but the findings of many other scientific organizations and regulatory agencies around the world that have confirmed the safety of biotech foods were left unreported. For example, one of the most exhaustive reports on the safety of biotech crops was published by the European Union, and summarized 15 years of research by 400 research teams. It concluded, "the use of more precise technology and the greater regulatory scrutiny (over biotech foods) probably make them even safer than conventional plants and foods." Other organizations that have confirmed the safety of biotech foods include: the United Nations' World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); the U.S. National Academy of Sciences; the Royal Society of London; and, national academies in China, Brazil, India, and Mexico.

It is also worth noting that more than 3,300 scientists including three Nobel Prize winners have signed a statement in support of biotechnology. Too often, they are not utilized as a valuable resource for information, including in Ms. Crowe's piece.

It is also not accurate to suggest that Health Canada is doing "…little research into the health effects of genetically modified food". While it is true that Health Canada and other Government of Canada departments and regulatory bodies do not themselves conduct the research trials to determine food/feed and environmental safety, it is disingenuous to suggest that there is little research. As is the case for pharmaceuticals, the developer of the plant biotechnology traits – not the government or regulating agency – is required to do many years of exhaustive testing to establish safety. Canada, like most of the developed world, has wisely separated the role of the referee and the player. Moreover, the testing is based on internationally established protocols and based on tests that the government prescribes. For your convenience, I have appended the testing requirements of the Canadian regulating agencies for reference. You will see they are exhaustive and demanding in their safety requirements. Typically, the research to meet these requirements takes several years and, once completed, it is not unusual for the regulatory agencies to take up to another two years to carefully and rigorously assess the results before rendering a judgment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we welcome accurate, fair, and informed analysis in the media on any risk associated with plant biotechnology commercialization. However, this segment had significant inaccuracies and was unfair. It was inaccurate and unfair as it relates to contamination and the undisciplined use of language. It was unfair in that it did not take into account a significant point of view – that of industry and the farmers. Also, the

segment was unfair in that it made no attempt to provide the public with the "benefit" side of the equation, only risks – perceived or real.

You will note on the following page that this letter has the support of a number of farmer, industry, other associations and individuals.

We look forward to your response to the specific points raised in this letter, how you will address the breach in the CBC's journalistic principles, and the corrective actions you will be taking.

Yours truly,

Lorne Hepworth
President
CropLife Canada

LHH/ch

c. Minister of Agriculture, Honourable Chuck Strahl
Minister Responsible for the CBC, Honourable Bev Oda
CBC Ombudsman, Vince Clarin
CropLife Canada Plant Biotechnology Members

Attachments:

- Guidelines for the assessment of Novel Feeds: Plant Sources (CFIA)
- Guidelines for the Safety Assessment of Novel Foods (Health Canada)
- Assessment Criteria for Determining Environmental Safety of Plants with Novel Traits (CFIA)

CropLife letter is supported by the undersigned organizations:

Jackie Frasier
Exec. Director

AG Care

Ashley O'Sullivan
President & CEO

AWB Ag-West Bio Inc.

Barbara Isman
President

CANOLA CANADA

Brian Tischler
President

Dorothy Murrell
President

CSTA ACCS

Jim Smolik
President

GRAIN GROWERS OF CANADA

Gordon Surgeoner
President

Ontario Agri-Food Technologies
from discovery to profit

Greg Devries
Chairman

Ontario Soybean Growers

AgCare (Agricultural Groups Concerned About Resources and the Environment) is a coalition of 17 Ontario farm organizations, representing the 45,000 farmers growing field crops, fruit, vegetables, and greenhouse products in the province. Our mandate is to provide science-based information and policy initiatives on agri-environmental issues on behalf of Ontario's farmers.

Ag-West Bio Inc. – is a membership based organization at the forefront of Saskatchewan's bio-economy. They work as a catalyst for partnerships and industry growth through investments, aiding strategic alliances, providing regulatory advice and communications. Their membership has grown to include over 100 corporations, associations and individuals representing natural health products and functional foods, bioproducts and bioprocesses, and agricultural biotechnology sectors.

Canola Council of Canada is a non-profit association representing the entire canola industry - growers, input suppliers, researchers, crushers, processors, exporters and marketers. The Council's Mission is to enhance the Canadian canola industry's ability to profitably produce and supply seed, oil and meal products that offer superior value to customers around the world.

Canadian Canola Growers Association represents all of the provincial canola grower organizations in Canada on national and international issues that affect canola growers.

Canadian Seed Trade Association (CSTA) - The 143 member companies of the Canadian Seed Trade Association are engaged in all aspects of the seed industry - research, plant breeding, production and marketing - both domestically and internationally. CSTA's membership ranges from those who market garden seed and herbs to large western grain handlers, and from small family-run, farm based businesses to large multinational corporations.

CropLife Canada is the trade association representing the developers, manufacturers, and distributors of plant science innovations – pest control products and plant biotechnology – for use in agriculture, urban and public health settings.

Grain Growers of Canada is a national organization comprised of major grain and oilseed commodity groups that stretch across the country. We are devoted to representing grain and oilseed producer interests in national policy development.

Ontario Agri-Food Technology - is a not for profit organization offering agriculture news, producer information, resources and tools and contacts.

Ontario Soybean Growers represents more than 25,000 soybean growers in Ontario, Canada. Their goal is to develop and promote a sound industry business environment that will allow Ontario soybean producers the opportunity for viable and profitable ongoing returns.