



## **I.D.E.A. Industry Update, August 24, 2001 (2 pages)**

### **I.D.E.A. Annual General Meeting and Conference**

The I.D.E.A. Annual General Meeting and Conference will take place February 11-12, 2002, at the Sheraton Winnipeg Hotel in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in conjunction with the CAAR convention. Keep posted for agenda details. Mark you calendars now, and plan to attend.

### **CANADA: Canadian Committee recommends voluntary GM food labelling**

The Canadian Biotechnology Advisory Committee (CBAC) has issued an Interim Report on Improving the Regulation of Genetically Modified Foods and Other Novel Foods in Canada. The report recommends the voluntary labelling of GM foods, on the basis that while Canadian want easy access to reliable and complete information regarding foods, the absence of a systematic and reliable standard for labelling GM foods prevents the verification of claims such as "GM free."

CBAC says that voluntary standards would allow the initial testing of the adequacy and effectiveness of the label.

Currently, 43 GM foods have been approved for sale in Canada, including "Roundup Ready" soybeans, and BT corn, but there is no requirement that they be labelled as such. Labelling is only required when significant nutritional changes have been made to the product, or due to the presence of potential food allergens.

Many companies in the health food sector have independently adapted non-GM labelling on their products. However, there has been a backlash in the grocery sector as the country's largest retailer, Loblaws, has ordered its suppliers to remove or cover any labels that identify food as being free of genetically modified ingredients. Loblaws staff has already wielded black felt markers for this purpose.

CBAC's report is the second in Canada this year by a non-governmental body, following an effort prepared by the prestigious Royal Society of Canada, released in February 2001. Many of the Royal Society's recommendations - including voluntary labelling and a calls for tighter regulations - have been adapted in the CBAC report.

On the regulatory track, The Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors (CCGD), which represents 80% of the sector, is currently working with the Canadian General Standards Board on a voluntary national standard. This standards process was initiated in 1999 and is expected to be completed sometime in 2002.

In total, the CBAC interim report makes five main and 24 supplementary draft recommendations aimed at improving the federal regulatory system for GM and other novel foods. Beyond the labelling issue, other recommendations include: a more clear-cut regulatory oversight, greater transparency of government, a more accountable management structure, better safety during research, and added monitoring and data collection about the potential long-term health and environment impacts of GM products.

Critics of CBAC, including Greenpeace and the Council of Canadians, have already slammed the interim report saying that it's impossible to monitor the long-term health impact of GM foods if there is no tracing or labelling system.

The Canadian Health Food Association says a voluntary approach will not work because food distributors and retailers will not voluntarily label their products as containing genetically modified material.

The CBAC is made up of 21 Canadians drawn from diverse backgrounds and sectors and was formed to provide advice to the seven ministers of the federal Biotechnology Ministerial Coordinating Committee (BMCC) on all issues related to the development and application of biotechnology. The CBAC's final report and formal recommendations on GM foods will be made available in early 2002. (Source: just-food.com, 24 Aug 2001)