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From: Carey Gillam, Reuters

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Farmers, Others Sue USDA over Monsanto GMO Alfalfa

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — A coalition of farmers, consumers and environmental activists Thursday sued the U.S. government over its approval of a biotech alfalfa that critics say will spell havoc for farmers and the environment."

Opening another front in the battle over genetically modified crops, the lawsuit contends that the U.S. Department of Agriculture improperly is allowing Monsanto Co. to sell an herbicide-resistant alfalfa seed while failing to analyze the public health, [environmental](#), and economic consequences of that action.

"The USDA failed to do a full environmental review when they deregulated this genetically engineered alfalfa," said Will Rastov, an [attorney](#) for Center for Food Safety, one of the plaintiffs. "They're going to wreak untold dangers into the [environment](#)."

The lawsuit asks the federal court in San Francisco to rescind the USDA's decision until a full environmental review has been completed.

The suit asserts that the genetically modified alfalfa will probably contaminate conventionally grown alfalfa at a fast pace, ultimately forcing farmers to pay for Monsanto's patented gene technology whether they want the technology or not.

The group says biotech alfalfa would also hurt production of organic dairy and beef products as alfalfa is a key cattle feed. And the suit claims farmers could lose export business, valued at an estimated \$480 million per year, because buyers in Japan and South Korea, major importers of U.S. alfalfa, have indicated they would avoid buying U.S. alfalfa once the genetically engineered variety is released.

Plaintiffs also said Monsanto is [marketing](#) the herbicide-tolerant crop in a way that encourages far greater applications of chemicals than alfalfa typically requires.

Alfalfa is the fourth most widely grown crop in the United States, behind corn, soybeans, and wheat.

South Dakota alfalfa farmer Pat Trask, one of the plaintiffs, said Monsanto's biotech alfalfa would ruin his conventional alfalfa seed business because it was certain his 9,000 acres would be contaminated by the biotech genes.

Alfalfa is very easily cross-pollinated by bees and by wind. The plant is also perennial, meaning GMO

plants could live on for years.

"The way this spreads so far and wide, it will eliminate the conventional alfalfa industry," said Trask. "Monsanto will own the entire alfalfa industry."

Monsanto has a policy of filing lawsuits or taking other legal actions against farmers who harvest crops that show the presence of the company's patented gene technology. It has sued farmers even when they have tried to keep their own fields free from contamination by biotech plants on neighboring farms.

"It's the desire of Monsanto to pursue global control and total control over the American alfalfa seed industry," said Trask.

Monsanto spokeswoman Mica DeLong said the company had no comment on the issue and referred inquires to USDA. Monsanto received regulatory clearance to begin selling the biotech alfalfa last summer.

The suit names Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service Administrator Ron Dehaven and Environmental Protection Agency administrator Steve Johnson as defendants.

APHIS spokeswoman Karen Eggert said the agency had no immediate comment. [EPA](#) also declined to comment and a spokeswoman for USDA could not be reached immediately.

In addition to the Center for Food Safety and the Trask family, the plaintiffs include the National Family Farm Coalition, [Sierra Club](#), Dakota Resources Council, and other farm, environmental and consumer groups.

Source: Reuters

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