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Export date: Sat Oct 31 6:10:16 2026 / +0000 GMT

?GMOs cannot feed the world?

A crowd of 70 area residents gathered November 7th for the Mono Mulmur Citizens' Coalition's (MC2) forum on the use of genetically modified organisms (GMO's) and how they affect us on a local and global level. Presentations, demonstrating that GMO's were not the only answer to feeding a hungry world, were organized by the Coalition's Environment Committee to answer concerns and confusion about the issue.

The presentation entitled ?GMOs: What have we gained and lost?? encouraged residents to ?consider buying more non-GMO and organic foods for the sake of the environment, climate change, social justice and our own health and that of our children.? The group hoped to see more ?support for local efforts like HFFA (Headwaters' Food and Farming Alliance) and their Farm to Food school program, farmers markets, and local growers.?

Member Bob Mitchell introduced presenters, including Ralph Manktelow with ?An Update on the Condition of the Bees;? Arnold DeGraaff presented a ?Perspective on the Science of Genetic Engineering;? and Gerald Poechma spoke about ?GMO's and his farming experience.?

Ralph Manktelow who reviewed issues with bees and the nature of neonics ? pesticides which are taken and transported to all parts of the plant and are found in the seeds as well as pollen and nectar. Manktelow says these pesticides, which essentially block nerve impulses in organisms, ?are water soluble and some 85 per cent goes into the environment having a cumulative effect.? As reported by the organization, it is known that low doses of insecticides seriously affect all of the bee's innate functioning and the latest non-industry meta-analysis of some 800 studies indicates that even low levels of neonics have a negative effect and can last for months and years in the environment. Two new chemicals have been given approval in Canada including Sulfoxaflor which also does nerve damage. The Ontario government has legislated a reduction to 20 per cent of current use by 2017, requiring more integrated pest management and more supervision of the use of neonics on farms. According to the organization, the ?Town of Mono has taken a firm position on this issue, and has communicated this clearly to the province.?

Arnold De Graaff presented, ?A Perspective on the Science of Genetic Engineering,? emphasizing how an ?uncritical belief? in reductionistic science and industrial agriculture ?distorts our lives and futures.? Mr. De Graaff presented more effective, sustainable, and efficient ways of modifying crops through a process of conventional breeding assisted by MAS (Marker Assisted Selection) which speeds up the process and engages local farmers in designing plants that work well in their environment. He emphasized that ?GMOs cannot feed the world. It is a myth.? Mr. De Graaff said that as consumers ?we can do many, concrete things now to buy organic and non-GMO and communicate with all levels of government about our concerns.?

The final speaker at the event was Gerald Poechman who has been farming organically since the 1980's; his farm was the first to be certified organic in Ontario in 1994. Although he said there are some useful products that can come from genetic modification, ?we need to carefully check who controls the product, the process and the system. We need to know who benefits now and later and finally we need to be very mindful of the consequences.? Ralph Manktelow concluded the presentations with, ?We are only here for a little while. Can we leave a country we're proud of for future generations??

By Marni Walsh